

**A MATTER OF QUALITY:
A STUDY OF PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS AND
EXPECTATIONS FROM SCHOOLING IN RURAL AND
URBAN AREAS OF UTTARAKHAND**

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Executive Summary of the Major Findings

- Parents not only expected the children to imbibe values and ethics, but they also expected schools to teach them to do so. Parents of all categories felt that education must help the child to develop into 'good' human beings.
- Parents, especially from the illiterate and low-income groups and rural women defined values positively in terms of ethics, non-violence, responsibility, faith, and self-esteem, while the urban, literate group defined ethics in negative terms (what shouldn't be) such as not stealing, not breaking locks, not cheating, not lying, not being greedy, not being selfish, not getting angry, not being in bad company, not indulging in vices like smoking, drinking, and gambling etc.
- Rural illiterate women made a distinction between internalising values and external behaviour. They differentiated between quality (*guna*) and internalising the quality (*gunana*). The stress was on 'being' (*hona*) rather than 'appearance' (*dikhana*). More women than men laid emphasis on developing the inner qualities of character.
- Rural parents and low-income groups stressed more on livelihoods i.e. going back to their traditional occupations like farming, animal husbandry, etc. In contrast the urban parents wanted their children to get good jobs, and do 'well' in life, which means to enjoy a higher standard of living than their own.
- Children from an American international school expected a good school to help a child discover his identity and were concerned with the low self-esteem of Indian children. On the other hand children from a private missionary school following the Indian syllabus, voiced no such concern and expected a good school to help a child succeed in migrating to the United States of America.
- All rural parents felt that the teacher should be a role model for the student. They also feel that a good teacher is one who loves the children so that the children are keen to go to school. While most of the literate, urban parents expected teachers to help the child get through class, competitive examinations, etc.
- Learning by understanding rather than rote learning was preferred.
- One main demand of rural parents was that schools should be closer to the village and that local teachers should be recruited.
- Absenteeism of teachers was a major complaint of the rural parents, while in urban areas, private tuition was the major problem.
- Most parents felt that school must bestow a sense of discipline and obedience among students. But, all parents rejected beating to discipline the child.
- Phrases like *barbad ho gaye* (our children have been ruined) in rural areas and *bigad gaye* (our children have become spoilt) in urban areas kept recurring all the time when parents referred to their children or present-day youth.
- All parents felt that the present day education system alienates children from their belief system, which leads to indifference towards land, family, and customs.
- It was felt that the literate has more information, can read and write, but his knowledge is restricted to books, and the illiterate has more practical knowledge, and an expertise in some particular skill.
- The illiterate person has no shame in doing any kind of manual work while the literate person is choosy about the kind of work he does. The literate person is physically more weak, and less capable. They are more ashamed of doing manual labour than the illiterate person. The literate person does less work at home, likes to roam around, dislikes physical labour, are lazy,

prefer to earn a lot of money without putting in enough effort, and they like a lot of rest and leisure.

- The inability of the educated to do manual work was a prime concern for all categories of respondents. It was also stated by most that education increases the feeling of inferiority towards working with hands.

- The youth also differentiated between superior and inferior work and feel that superior work is that which is done as far from the house or village as possible, and also one in which direct transaction of money was involved. Working with machines is considered superior work while working with hands, whether in the fields or in a craft, is considered inferior work.

- The literate is less responsible and lacks discipline, whereas the illiterate person is more responsible towards elders and family. The literate have less respect for the elderly, answer rudely, do what pleases them, orders people older than him/her, and uses more abusive language.

- The literate person is selfish and greedy and wants good things (food, clothes and lifestyle). He/she aspires for consumer items and imitates the West. The literate person is more prone to individualism. The literate people have a greater tendency to drink, smoke, gamble, see films and generally spend a lot of money on entertainment.

- The responses as a whole indicate that in rural areas literacy had a major impact on the responses while in urban areas it was the income factor which influenced responses.

Preface

For the past ten years SIDH, a voluntary organisation, has been involved in providing educational opportunities to those deprived of it, in the rural areas of Tehri Garhwal district in Central Himalayas. SIDH started its first school in Jaunpur block of Tehri district, as a direct response to the needs of the community. As a result of its responsiveness to the community many changes have taken place which are reflected in SIDH's programmes. Over the years, SIDH has grown from one to 18 primary and pre-primary schools (in villages where there are no government schools).

During the course of SIDH's work it was observed that most parents were unhappy with the impact of the present education system upon their children. SIDH gradually began focussing on issues of quality and relevance and exploring the links between micro and macro issues — between education and the larger socio-political, cultural and historical context within which it operated. Today SIDH attempts to identify the assumptions underlying the current system of education in the country and is experimenting with alternatives to formal education.

The present study hopes to gain an insight into the relevance of the present education system in the country by examining people's perceptions regarding education. It has been a tremendous learning experience for the research team. During the research we realised that perhaps our colonial past forced us to be servile for so long, that we have forgotten to speak out what we really think or feel. Instead we speak what we presume others would want to hear. Our aspirations are moulded by the dominant classes and instead of challenging them to change their ways we tend to imitate them. Therefore it is difficult to find out the real needs. A question asked one way may give a certain kind of response, while the same question asked in a different manner may evoke a response quite contrary to the previous one. These contradictions and conflicts need to be examined sensitively, keeping in mind the historical reasons for such behaviour. This study not only examines the contradictions and conflicts but also throws light on how aspirations and attitudes are moulded by modern education. If the responses are examined deeply then the sharp contrast between the responses of urban, rural; male, female; and illiterate, literate reveals many significant issues.

The idea of the research project was to find out what people thought about education. So the obvious area of exploration was their definition of a good school and other questions along similar lines. We had discussions with varied groups from both rural and urban areas along these lines. The initial responses were not unexpected. They have been recorded by other research projects that have restricted themselves to matters of access like enrolment and dropout rates (and their reasons); infrastructure needs etc. Had we also left it at that, even then, it would still have been a valid research project. Our findings and recommendations, in that case, would have been restricted to the problem of access. But we probed further and in the course of this pursuit we stumbled upon the contradictions which is perhaps the lot of a society mesmerised into imitating without questioning. These conflicts and contradictions reveal that it is not access but relevance, which is a major concern of the people. It is quite possible that the problem of access will be resolved to a large extent if we make necessary changes according to the real needs of the people. This is possible only if the people are heard sensitively keeping in mind the fact that Indians, by and large, have a different way of responding. They are not as forthright as their western counterparts. If deeper examination is not done the conclusions could be quite contrary to what is actually being said.

For us this study was a very humbling experience, because our findings in a way only confirmed what Gandhiji knew without having undertaken such elaborate exercises more than 80—90 years ago. The heartening thing was that our so-called 'uneducated' women and men still speak the language of Gandhiji. This study brings out the clarity of thought and lack of dilemmas among the rural, low income, and illiterate groups, compared to the urban, high-income, literate groups. Perhaps, the sentiments of the people or 'community' need to be taken seriously by our policymakers.

In considering the findings of this study, it is clear that people are not happy with the present education system in India and its exclusive focus on imparting information. They want a value-based and economically relevant system just like Gandhiji did; one which will be a means toward making their children responsible and useful members of society. Yet, as the study indicates, there is immense social pressure to continue sending children to schools, regardless of the quality of education received. Why have Gandhiji's ideas on education be given so little attention and not seriously implemented in independent India? Why is it that most parents failed to make a connection between the results of education that they desire to see in their children and the kind of schools which are going to lead them there? Significantly, there was little comment on the qualitative aspects of schools such as the curriculum and pedagogy. People agreed on the need for change yet they did not have any positive suggestions on how to improve the system.

Gandhiji often talked about the difficulties of trying to change the system of which one is a product, as well as of the paralyzing effects of modern education and State-domination on the ability to envision alternatives. The close links between dominant ideologies of 'development', 'progress', market economics and modern education 'makes it very difficult to defy conventions and work toward alternatives. In fact, the dominant system is so pervasive that the alternatives that exist are isolated and can never become the norm. Yet, as Gandhiji believed, it is still the responsibility of individuals who have a sense of perspective and are able to see the larger picture, even if they are a part of it, to continue to fight the tide and provide examples of the possibility of alternatives.

We fought and overthrew foreign domination but it remains in a different garb. Physical domination is no longer necessary - the control of the mind and sophistication in technology make it possible to exert even greater influence without physically dominating the country. Education plays a vital role in influencing the mind, which is confirmed by this research. The contrast between the answers of women and men on the one hand and the 'illiterates' and the 'literate' on the other are most revealing. Professor U. R. Ananthmurthy had once said, "Thank God for illiterates of my country. It is they who have kept India still intact and alive." We could also say so after this experience. Perhaps it is good that we have a high rate of illiteracy; not only because we will then have less people, in Prof. Saran's words, to be 'exorcised of false learnings' but also because we will have more resources to learn from. The highlights of this study are some profound and simply articulated suggestions by rural illiterate women.

We feel there is a flaw in the design of most research studies: the researcher tends to exclude his/her own class from the research sample. This could be because of the focus on 'objectivity' in the western scientific paradigm or because of our colonial past which excluded the elite from the majority. It is normally the more advantaged people like us, who conduct most of the research and it is not surprising that their findings and recommendations are very much in alignment with the world view of the powers-that-be. Perhaps this is because we who conduct these studies have false notions of our own superiority and a superficial self-confidence, and are not aware or willing to examine our own biases and our past. Hence the research often leads to conclusions which collaborate the views of the ruling elite. In this study we often had this problem. Our own guilt and prejudices kept creeping in unnoticed and only an honest self examination, which was both disturbing and painful, helped us overcome the hurdle. We are indebted to Dharampalji whose books and essays helped us to constantly introspect, which was essential for gaining the insight, which we have tried to bring out in this study.

It is generally believed that the issue of access is more important than quality; but the two are entirely different issues. On a journey, it is more important to check whether we are going in the right direction, before we start counting the number of miles we have covered. If the direction is wrong then we will surely end up perpetuating our initial mistake. Therefore the issue of quality and relevance must be given priority. It is in this context that SIDH decided to make a systematic inquiry about the perception of the

community about the present education system and also their expectations. This would enable SIDH to work towards making education a tool for social transformation.

Many of the findings in this study challenge the inherent assumptions behind the 18 core indicators identified under the Education for All 2000 Assessment exercise being carried out globally. The country reports are to be presented in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000. This study hopes to draw the attention of the policy makers to the issue of relevance in education instead of only focussing on the quantitative aspects of education.

Survey Methodology

Phase 1: Plan and Design of the Research

After 10 years of experience SIDH felt the need to study community perspectives regarding education, both to improve SIDH's school programme and to forcefully communicate the voices of the marginalised majority to those in power. As a result SIDH set up a research and advocacy wing – Sanshodhan – to conduct studies which could be used as an advocacy tool. This study was conceived by Pawan K. Gupta and Anuradha Joshi as a result of their experience with SIDH schools and frequent interactions with the community. When the study was conceived the idea was to study conditions of success for a primary school (to compare NGO-run schools and government schools) and also to study the impact of education on social values and behaviour (a village-level perspective).

The subject of the study was then shared with field team members and it was decided not to engage in a comparative study between government schools and NGO schools as it would be an exercise in futility. After intense discussion the broad objectives were finalised as:

- Identification of the parameters of a good school
- Identification of the parameters of a successful school
- The differences and similarities between the two and any significant patterns in the perception of people according to sex, income and urbanisation.

The objectives at this stage were based upon the assumption that people have different perceptions about the real and the ideal – a good school and a successful school – and that the study would help to identify the gaps and similarities between the two. It was decided to have three kinds of respondents: parents, teachers and children, both from rural and urban areas. It was felt necessary to include the perspectives of elite schools as well. The respondents would be categorised on the basis of income, gender and rural/urban. The villages of Jaunpur block comprised the rural sample (See Appendix 1 for details of Jaunpur) while the towns of Mussoorie and Dehradun comprised the urban sample. It was decided that qualitative methods, namely FGDs (Focus Group Discussions) and Interviews would be largely used. Three field research assistants Jagmohan, Siya and Jaipal were selected to work under the guidance of Anuradha.

Phase 2: Mobilising the Research Team

i) Orientation

An orientation session for the research team was conducted by Anuradha. The need and the objectives of the study and its relevance in today's social and political climate as an advocacy tool were discussed. The need for this research became the basis of the introductory address in the field before an interview or a FGD. The target group and its details (See section on sampling and also Appendix 2) were discussed, and parameters for selecting the high income group (HIG), and low income group (LIG) in both rural and urban areas decided. The importance of team spirit was underlined.

ii) Training

All three team members had been trained in qualitative research methods and had prior experience of data collection in the field. However a refresher course was conducted in qualitative research methods, with special emphasis on listening skills, open-ended questions and probing techniques. There was need for additional training in recording and analysing the raw data and so a workshop in analysis of data was conducted. At this juncture we got some timely suggestions from Amod Khanna, an expert in applied research in education, and Glynnis George an anthropologist from Canada engaged in post-doctoral

research. Both gave invaluable suggestions about operationalising the objectives, through simple yet effective methods.

iii) Management of raw data

Techniques of recording the raw data of interviews and FGDs was shared with the team. They were asked to work in pairs and always have a de-briefing session after each session to record their personal observations, non-verbal signals of participants, feelings or insights gained. Meticulous records were kept, and wherever possible an audio recorder was used during interviews and FGDs.

iv) Review and Supervision

As the process documentation was important the team was asked to keep records of their problems, suggestions and learning at the end of each day. As Jagmohan had the maximum research experience, he was asked to hold review sessions for the rural area and Anuradha for the urban area, where problems and difficulties were discussed and sorted out.

Phase 3: Pre-test and Subsequent Changes

As a result of further discussions within the research team the objectives were re-formulated and questions re-stated to fulfil the objectives. An exercise to convert the questions into simple everyday language (based on the profile of the target group) was conducted. At this stage it was decided to drop Dehradun and concentrate only on Mussoorie. After a presentation to senior SIDH members, a topic guide was prepared and a tentative schedule for a pre-test was finalised. A pilot survey was conducted before the actual survey so as to sensitise the investigators to problems, to help them develop interview skills and guide them on how to do in-depth probing.

A pre-test was conducted to test the topic guide. After the test, a de-briefing with senior team members led to the identification of gaps and consequent modifications. Most of the responses indicated that the people rejected the assumption underlying the original objectives. People made no distinction between good and successful schools, as they perceived a cause-effect relationship between a good and successful school. A good school was successful and vice versa. Hence the aim of the research was re-defined as exploring peoples' perceptions about a good school and its relevance, and impact upon children. The objectives of the study were then limited to studying the impact of education on social values and behaviour, and expectations of people from schools and children. It was also found that literacy and age played a significant role in affecting the responses. So these two variables were added to the list of variables: income, urbanisation and gender. The pre-test also revealed that it was necessary to define a middle income group. Accordingly the parameters of the income groups were modified.

Phase 4: Development of Field Strategy

As the survey was qualitative in nature, five open-ended questions were selected (See Appendix 3). A topic guide was designed to help the facilitators. The facilitators were asked to be alert towards all judgmental responses, and probe these in greater depth. The questionnaire had space for reporting the personal comments of the facilitator on verbal and non-verbal responses of the participants. Demographic data of the participants (name, age, sex, number of members in the household, number of children, children going to school, income from various sources, etc.) were also recorded.

It was decided to have an unstructured format with open-ended questions. This was done so that the differences in response could emerge spontaneously, and prevent stereotyped and cryptic responses that are often given to leading/structured questions. This method helped us to collect rich, qualitative data which revealed the differences in perceptions and priorities of the people in the different categories.

Details of the field strategy, like selection of the target group, venue, preparation of the site etc. were discussed. It was decided to start with the rural area and have a mid-term review before continuing with the urban area. Both FGDs and interviews were used for collecting qualitative information. The research team consisted of a reporter who noted down the entire information ad verbatim, and a facilitator who led the discussions. The discussions were also recorded on audio except when the participants objected to the use of the audio system.

The sequence of activities at this stage was as follows:

1. Preparing a Topic guide for FGDs, for the different sections of the target group.
2. Identifying and listing the participants for the FGDs, and asking their preference of time and place of FGDs.
3. Preparing the site, time and material for the FGDs as far as possible.
4. Informing the participants about the time and venue of the FGDs, and getting their confirmation.
5. Conducting the FGDs

The data collection took place between November 1998 to March 1999. The interviews were conducted either at home or at school. The FGDs were conducted at SIDH's training centre at Kempt. The target groups were informed about the purpose of the visit, followed by the FGD and interview session. At the end of every month a presentation was given to senior SIDH members and the feedback received was incorporated.

Phase 5: Analysis of Data and Report Writing

The raw data was analysed according to majority and minority responses and then compiled. Responses of each group according to age, literacy, gender, income and urban/rural area were compared within the group and with other groups. Representative quotes were collected. Some patterns were identified and the insights gained as a result of identifying the conflicts and dilemmas within peoples' responses were recorded. An 8-day workshop was held for analysing the data, which was then presented in a 1-day workshop to senior team members. Based on the feedback received the team members visited the field again for three days to fill the gaps. Another 8-day workshop was held to complete the analysis. After the analysis was complete the report was written out. The raw data reports (interviews and FGDs) are available separately.

Sampling

The sample included parents, children and teachers from both rural and urban areas. The total number of respondents was 168 (For details see Appendix 2). They were divided into the following categories:

Parents: HIG Urban
 MIG Urban
 LIG Urban
 HIG Rural
 MIG Rural
 LIG Rural

Teachers: From Urban elite schools
 From Urban govt schools
 From Rural govt schools
 From Rural NGO schools

Notes From the Field

At the end of the research the team reviewed their work and made the following suggestions for those who would like to have a follow-up or would like to replicate this study.

The crucial issue for the field researchers was to extract the true feelings of the respondents. The difficulties faced were:

- Women are always hard-pressed for time and could not spare much time for discussions.
- Since the researcher was a local person a lot of things were taken for granted. Also, feeling comfortable with the researcher they would go off the point and get involved in local gossip or arguments unrelated to the topic being discussed.
- In FGDs one person would dominate the group and the others would keep silent either out of respect for the other person or because they had not thought about the issue themselves.
- Sometimes the respondents, specially rural government teachers, would get defensive and not give honest answers.

The suggestions of the team were:

- Use the interview method for people who do not open up in group discussions.
- Respondents who get defensive must be handled sympathetically.
- The use of an audio recorder distracts the respondents. Hence if the equipment is kept out of sight it eases the flow of conversation.
- For interviews it helps if the place and time are communicated to the respondents beforehand.
- The relevance of the research must be clearly communicated to the group and they must be convinced of the relevance. This will result in honest and fruitful discussions.
- It is important for the researcher to be highly motivated.

Objectives

The following were the objectives of this study:

- To study the impact of the current system of education on social values and behaviour in urban and rural areas of Uttarakhand.
- To identify the gaps between the parents' expectations from schools and the reality.
- To identify the gaps between the expectations of parents and teachers from their children and the reality.
- To identify the dilemmas and pressures of parents regarding schooling of their children.
- To make a set of recommendations for planners and policy makers of elementary education in the country to make the present-day schooling more relevant.

Major Findings

The research was originally designed only to explore people's perception about the current system of education, and how it varied across factors like literacy, income, gender, age and urbanisation. It was found that literacy had the major influence on the responses followed by the urbanisation factor. The findings of the study went well beyond the original objectives. A significant finding was the identification of several contradictions in the views of the people.

- Contradiction regarding the role of education, (is it about getting a job or being a good person?) Though they expected their children to be honest, committed, kind, considerate, helpful, etc. they were sending their children to school in the expectation that the children would get jobs, specially government jobs.
- Contradiction between their perception of a literate person and their desire to send children to school. The majority responses showed that the perception of a literate person was one who remains unemployed, cannot do manual work, lacks ethics/morality, becomes self-centered, and starts subscribing to the consumer culture. Yet they wanted to send their children to school.
- Contradiction between jobs and livelihoods. In rural areas although the people knew that 'one harvest of matar (green peas) could fetch more money than a person's annual salary', yet their priority was a government job for their children.
- Contradiction in the attitude to manual labour. The people regretted that their literate children did not like to do manual labour, yet they said that they were sending their children to school so that 'they will not have to cut grass and pick up gobar like us'.
- Contradiction between their expectations from children and their expectations from schools. Though they expected their children to imbibe humanitarian values, their expectations from school were largely about infrastructure and management issues (See sections A and B).

SECTION A: EXPECTATIONS FROM CHILDREN

“Hona sikhao, dikhana nahin” (Teach them ‘to be’ not ‘to appear’)

Though the study did not specifically probe the aspect of values in education it is very surprising that imbibing values emerged as an important expectation of all categories of parents. Parents felt that the children must develop into ‘good’ human beings. Parents not only expected the children to imbibe values and ethics, but they also expected schools to teach them to do so. There was a significant difference in the manner of expression by the rural, illiterate and in particular the women in these categories on one side and the urban educated on the other side.

A majority of the parents, especially from the illiterate, low-income groups and rural women felt that attention needed to be paid to teaching values and ethics in schools. They defined values positively in terms of ethics, non-violence, responsibility, faith, and self-esteem. Ethics was defined as honesty, justice, truthfulness, integrity and ‘*shudhta*’ (clean body, mind and soul). Responsibility was defined as determination, duty and commitment. Rural women spoke much more about integrity and commitment than their urban counterparts. Of particular interest was the distinction they made between internalising the values and the external behaviour. They differentiated between quality (*guna*) and internalising the quality (*gunana*). They were more concerned about internalising qualities of good character (*gunana*) and the stress was on ‘being’ (*hona*) rather than ‘appearance’ (*dikhana*). More women than men laid emphasis on developing the inner qualities of character. Parents expected the schools to teach children about values, ethics, responsibility etc. “Teach them how to internalise good teachings not merely to read” (*padhna nahin unhe gunana sikhao*); “teach them to distinguish between appearing and being” (*unhe dikhane aur hone mein fark sikhao*) were some of their expectations from schools. Illiterate women said, “It is not enough that children read books, it is important that they are able to distinguish between the right and the wrong kind of books.” It is significant when they say, “Goodness must be within oneself, otherwise my defects would be the cause of my ruin” (*guna andar hone chahiye nahin to mera avguna mujhe khayega*).

Only rural HIG women mentioned qualities of love and non-violence. But a loose operational definition was given by all rural parents, teachers and children as treating older people with respect, showing hospitality, speaking gently, not fighting with each other, with a lot of emphasis on strong family bonds, “If homes are happy there is happiness outside too” (*Ghar shudh bahar bhi shudh*).

Parents also expected that education should change the attitude of the children towards working with hands.

The urban, literate group defined ethics in negative terms (what shouldn’t be) such as not stealing, not breaking locks, not cheating, not lying, not being greedy, not being selfish, not getting angry, not being in bad company, not indulging in vices like smoking, drinking, and gambling etc. And when they positively defined ethics it was defined in terms of good behaviour like politeness, showing respect to parents, etc. It is significant that this group (urban) laid stress on ‘appearance’ and ‘behaviour’. They did not make any distinction between ‘*hona*’ and ‘*dikhana*’. Significantly, the urban LIG group did not speak about values.

Literacy, much more than income, affected the responses between rural and urban responses. The lower the literacy, the higher was the priority given to inner qualities or character. Even the illiterate HIG men in rural areas, gave priority to good character rather than a job. HIG men did not want their sons to become drivers, because according to them bus drivers and conductors go to ‘strange places where they drink and womanise.’ They also expected their children to return to farming after guidance in school, though they spoke of cash crops and increase of income by modernising agricultural techniques. The literate HIG did not give any priority to farming but expected their children to come first in class, get jobs and did not want their children to have tobacco or waste their money. It seems clear that literate rural

people were more involved with economic issues while the illiterate people were concerned with issues like ethics, values, etc.

Faith: Rural women and elite children have articulated the concept of faith in different ways. Faith was defined by rural women in terms of absolute faith in some higher power who listens to them if they have integrity. They felt it was important to teach children about commitment and integrity and importance of having credibility with others. They felt that children must be taught the importance of honouring one's word (*vachan*) and the power it gives to the self. One can get a glimpse of the source of this strength, when an illiterate rural woman says with great confidence that whatever she says has to happen (*meri baat puri hogi*). They also talk a lot about *dharma* and how everything works out for those who follow *dharma*. "*Dharmi ki jar hari hari*," (one who follows the path of *dharma* remains happy) or *dharmi ka bhala* or *kar bhala ho bhala* (if one does good, one is rewarded). *Dharma*, in the way it is meant here, is not religion. It is more to do with the 'law of nature' or 'ethical living', or 'a code of conduct to live by'. Great faith is expressed in following the path of *dharma*. The belief is that in the ultimate analysis one who follows the path of *dharma* tends to gain and this faith must be inculcated in children.

Significantly, the only other group who spoke of generating faith, joy and power within oneself, self-esteem and developing the voice of conscience to distinguish between the right and wrong were elite school children belonging to an international school in Mussoorie.

"Naukri ki jad pathar par" (A job has no roots)

Education has generally been perceived as a tool to get a job. Here a distinction between the rural and urban definition of a job must be understood. In rural areas of the mountain regions, where job opportunities are non-existent, the only job is a '*sarkari naukri*' (government job), whereas for the urban people a job also includes jobs in the private sector. However, the most coveted job, according to all categories, is a government job, because it means less work, job security and one can also expect '*upar ki amdani*' (bribes). Both rural and urban people consider a job, specially a government job, as their goal in life. The difference between the rural and urban people lies in the degree of hope of getting a job. Whereas the urban people still see a job as the only alternative, the rural lot have given up all hope.

A rural, urban and low income, high income divide was seen in the responses. Rural parents and low-income groups stressed more on traditional occupations as compared to urban parents and high-income groups. Rural illiterate women and rural LIG had expectations that their children would earn their livelihood from traditional occupations. With them a job did not enjoy a high priority. "*Naukari ki jad pathar par*" (a job has shallow roots implying that a job does not have security) was mentioned by many. They elaborated on this by saying that a person dependent on a job is subject to the vagaries of market conditions and inflation, while a person depending mostly on traditional activities like farming etc. was less prone to external factors. They spoke about the hidden costs attached to a paid job (usually in urban centres) like renting a room, transportation and other useless (*faltu*) expenses e.g., going to a film etc.

The resentment is more acute among rural people who view present-day education as more destructive rather than constructive. For instance, Pulmo Devi, from village Bel Talla says: "I do not know how many opportunities the present system opens up for our children, but it has certainly closed one door for them, that of returning to their fields." "Even graduates cannot get jobs." Most parents consider rising unemployment as resulting in a feeling of hopelessness among the youth. The rural MIG and HIG groups expressed hopelessness regarding getting a job, especially where government jobs were concerned: "*Umeed to yahi hai ki DM, Patwari bane, par puri kahan hoti hai*" (we hope that our children could become the DM or patwari but how can it happen). It is this sense of despondency, which now makes them wish that their children should rather take up traditional livelihoods as an alternative to a job. The rural parents hope that children should not roam about aimlessly (*faltu na ghume*). HIG rural men also felt

that if their young literate sons could be 'guided' back to their farms, they could earn more from one harvest of cash crops, like peas, than from their annual salary from jobs.

Even among rural children jobs were definitely preferred but they spoke of non-traditional jobs like motor mechanic rather than farming (or other traditional occupations) as the latter was considered to be inferior.

In contrast to the rural parents, the urban parents wanted their children to get 'standard' jobs, and do 'well' in life which meant to enjoy a higher standard of living than their own. Urban children also expected 'standard' jobs (which means a desk job as opposed to working with hands), and would not accept just any job. Girls from urban areas regardless of class, even LIG, wanted to become fashion designers "like Ritu Beri".

SECTION B: EXPECTATIONS FROM SCHOOL

Given the highly qualitative nature of parents' expectations from their children, the expectations of the majority of parents from schools were a study in contrast.

According to government teachers, the most important function of a school, was to help a student get a job, whereas private school teachers saw school as a place to develop the individual interest of the child and inculcate values, confidence and self-esteem in children.

There was a distinct difference between children from two different kinds of urban HIG schools. Children from a school which followed an American syllabus and catered to non-residential Indian and children from western countries expected a good school to help a child discover his identity and were concerned with the low self-esteem of Indian children. On the other hand children from a private missionary school following the Indian syllabus, voiced no such concern and expected a good school to help a child succeed in migrating to the USA.

Parents expectations from school have been grouped under five broad categories, namely school infrastructure, school management, discipline and hygiene, curriculum/pedagogy, and role of teacher.

i) Infrastructure

Expectations from school infrastructure include the following issues in order of priority, viz. inclusion of sports/cultural activities, benches/chairs, reading material, computer/lab, good building and boarding facility. The need for benches/chair and reading material have been emphasised far more by the rural people rather than urban counterparts.

Urban people irrespective of income groups have spoken of the need of library facilities. Similarly they have also perceived the need of computer learning to be included in the curriculum.

Both urban HIG and rural MIG and HIG parents expected a good school to have good building. The urban HIG wanted hobby classes.

ii) School Management

School management issues according to priority are low teacher-pupil ratio, importance of school dress, having a school near homes, school prayers, having more male teachers, having a good English teacher, having local teachers. Even rural parents expressed the need for PTA meetings. Significantly, rural parents had much more information about the schools and teachers than their counterparts in urban areas.

One main demand of rural parents was that schools should be closer to the village. In the study area, there is one school per gram sabha. A gram sabha may cover three or four villages. This means that children have to walk long distances to reach the school. Not only is this physically strenuous for the young child, but it also prevents the girl child from attending school as it means spending a long time away from home. Another demand of rural parents was that local teachers should be recruited.

iii) Discipline and Hygiene

The concept of discipline was articulated at two levels. One was at the level of the child and the other was the self-discipline on the part of the teachers and school management.

One of the prominent expectations from a good school frequently mentioned by the people was that the school must bestow a sense of discipline and obedience among students. But, all parents rejected beating as a way to discipline the child. Everyone strongly felt that if the teacher was hostile the students would

not wish to attend school. However, at the same time parents expect the teacher to be strict and be able to discipline the students. The teachers did not have anything to say about beating the students.

By discipline, the respondents also meant the need to open school on time, regularity of students in attending school and a proper code of conduct. The rural parents strongly objected to the laxity of the present system where the schools are run according to the whims and fancies of the teachers. Rural children also expected a good school to focus on discipline (adhering to time, uniform etc).

Another factor, which has also been given much importance by the participants, is the issue of cleanliness. Around 50 per cent of the rural HIG parents felt that the students must learn to live more hygienically at home as well as at school. Regularity in school and dressing well/wearing a clean uniform were issues mentioned more by rural parents rather than urban parents.

iv) Curriculum/Pedagogy

The responses on the nature of curriculum/pedagogy have been prioritised as teaching of skills, which are the basis of traditional livelihoods, teaching of moral values/ethics, learning by understanding, teaching of English, and inclusion of indigenous knowledge and general knowledge.

Traditional skills/livelihoods has been given priority both by urban and rural LIG. Learning by understanding rather than rote learning was preferred. Expectation of the rural LIG from their educated children was that they should acquire enough knowledge so as not to get cheated by others. They should not get fooled or bluffed by others (*kisi se takkar na khaye*) and be able to distinguish between right and wrong.

Necessity of teaching of English was articulated much more by literate rural people, and was not an issue in urban responses, perhaps because English is taught in most urban schools. All urban children expected teaching of English as an important requirement of a good school.

The HIG, urban female and rural children advocated for an open forum/space where the child can express freely without any inhibition or fear, where they can share their feelings openly and be able to articulate their problems.

SIDH teachers and private, elite schoolteachers had a lot to say about curriculum. They advocated a curriculum with the child as the focus. The urban and rural government teachers were completely silent upon this issue.

v) Role of Teacher

“Good schools are made by good teachers, not good students,” is what most people felt. The duties expected of a teacher have been prioritised as: good teaching, responsibility, regular attendance, good relationship with children and peers, being a good role model, not beating the child and maintaining discipline in class. All respondents felt that the teacher should be a *role model* for the student.

By responsibility the rural parents mean that the teacher must be concerned if a child does not come to school, must inquire about his/her personal problems, be sensitive to their needs and act like a guardian in the school. They also feel that a good teacher is one who loves the children so that the children are keen to go to school. A rural parent said: “*Roti khathe khathe bhi school bhag jata hai*” (Sometimes the child is so keen to go to school that he rushes off even if he has half eaten his breakfast). Rural parents stressed much more on the importance of the role of a teacher than other groups. Most of the literate, urban parents expected teachers to help the child get through class, competitive examinations, etc

Rural children from government schools expected that teachers should attend classes, not get drunk, and not beat them without any reason. They also expected that teachers should not discriminate between rich and poor, and low and high caste students. Urban LIG and MIG children expected a good teacher to be unbiased, free of personal prejudices and not insult students as it lowered their self-esteem.

Private school teachers laid great stress on the teacher's creativity and also the importance of teachers as role models. However the government school teachers did not comment on the responsibility of teachers. They felt that the parents were indifferent towards the children.

There was a demand for more male teachers. Studies in other regions have found a preference for female teachers. In mountain regions lady teachers find the tough life difficult to adjust to and are thus more prone to absenteeism. Secondly, there was general perception among the participants that discipline among students was a crucial factor and lady teachers are less able to control the students. Another reason for preference for male teachers came from panchayat representatives who felt that it is difficult for them to take any action against lady teachers whereas the male teachers can be questioned and rebuked if they fail in their duties. This needs to be looked at seriously as the general perception is that lady teachers are preferable in primary schools.

"Achcha school? Jahan bachche ja sake." (A good school is where children can go.)

Broadly speaking, access to choices, whether due to the rural, urban factor or income, influenced the expectations of the people. The rural-urban divide was significant because of the limited choice of schools in villages. Perceptions were effected by the exposure of the people. Most definitions of a 'good' school were based on what people had seen. In rural areas where there were fewer choices, the minimum demands of the HIG group was far lower than those of urban LIG group, specially regarding teachers and facilities.

In the rural areas, the majority of LIG, MIG and HIG send their children to government schools. Private schools or schools run by NGOs are available in a few villages. In urban areas people have more choices. The MIG group send their children to private English medium schools. The urban HIG send their children to more expensive elite English medium schools because they feel that there is better discipline, individual attention to weak children, and cleaner surroundings. The LIG group send their children to government schools. Choices for the LIG are however restricted by what is accessible and affordable regardless of where they stay. So we have the rural LIG saying that what is best for them is what is accessible. In fact the concept of 'best' is completely absent in their opinions. A good school is one where the children can go (*jahan bachhe ja sake*). This is further defined by them as a school which is close to home (transport cost), where there are no rules regarding clean dresses or wearing shoes, fees, tiffin, or where the children do not need to take money to school etc. "The government schools are good enough for us. In private schools there are other expenses and pressures that make it difficult for us."

The nature of complaints of parents also defines good or bad schools. Absenteeism of teachers was a major complaint of the rural parents, and in urban areas, private tuition was the major problem. As tuition has to do with income, we have urban LIGs defining a good school as one where there is no pressure to give tuition, whereas the urban MIGs define a good school as one where the results are good because of the facility of tuition. The MIG come under maximum peer pressure to do their 'best' for their children.

A significant finding was a noticeable change among the urban HIG, in their choice of schools. After class 8, some of them withdraw their children from the elite English medium schools and send their children to Hindi medium government-aided private schools. The reasons given were that these schools are better geared for preparing for competitive exams. Parents also mentioned that in the elite schools due to peer pressure the children would demand a lot of consumer goods and were generally impolite and unruly, which was another reason for withdrawing them from elite schools in higher classes. Though in

the lower classes they preferred the elite schools so that the children could become proficient in English and because of other reasons cited elsewhere in this study.

Section C: IMPACT ON CHILDREN

“*Bachche Barbaad Ho Gaye*” (Our children have been ruined)

While exploring the impact of education, phrases like *barbad ho gaye* (our children have been ruined) and *bigad gaye* (our children have become spoilt) kept recurring all the time when parents in rural/urban areas referred to their children or present-day youth. Almost all parents expressed disappointment and unhappiness with the way their children were turning out and blamed the current education system for making their children ‘*barbaad*’ or destroying them (in the rural areas) and ‘*bigaad diya*’ or for spoiling them (in the urban areas). The word *barbad* was used by rural parents while referring to youth who refuse to do any work either in the fields or at home even when they are unable to get government or white-collar jobs. These children are useless, they neither earn money nor look after their family and old parents. In the urban context the term “*bigad gaye hain*” (they have been spoilt) referred to rude, arrogant youth infatuated by the market culture. The present day education has not only alienated the child from the land but also from participating in household activities, as schools are often seen as a means of escaping the drudgery of daily household chores and agricultural activities. All parents felt that the present day education system alienates their children from their belief system, which leads to indifference towards land, family, and customs. The urban MIG felt their children studying in English-medium schools had become emotionally alienated. The majority of them had sent their elder children to non-English medium schools, and so could compare between sibling behaviour in the same family. As a result they had a lot of complaints about the English medium schools which according to them was the main reason why their children had become alienated from their families. “Our children have become arrogant and rude.” They were unhappy and yet continued to send their children to these schools.

A surprising new trend was noticed among the HIG parents (in Mussoorie) who send their children to elite English medium schools as day scholars (in Mussoorie almost all elite English medium schools are boarding schools). Of late a majority of this group displayed a tendency to withdraw their children from these schools after they have completed class VIII or X and get them admitted to private (government aided) Hindi medium schools. The reasons cited for this were 1) better preparation for competitive examinations in government or Hindi medium schools, (According to the people the children who succeeded in competitive exams were from government schools). 2) Children developing a strong attraction towards expensive consumer items (like Nike, Reebok shoes) which these parents find difficult to afford, 3) Becoming arrogant and rude and 4) In the case of girls – not developing right social ‘values’. This is an interesting trend as the same parents initially send their children to these schools for ‘better discipline, individual attention and cleaner surroundings’ and later regret it.

According to the opinion of the majority young people become ‘*barbad*’ or ‘*bigade*’ when:

- They study but do not get jobs, and choose not to earn their livelihoods by working with their hands (in rural areas).
- When they do not respect their parents and elders, do not listen to them, talk rudely, do what they wish to do, behave arrogantly at home, not inform the people at home about their whereabouts (in both rural and urban areas).
- When they smoke, drink, steal, cheat, hide facts, run away from school, see too many films (in urban and rural areas).

Everybody agreed that the age of onset of *barbadi* is between 15-18 years, usually between class 8-10.

The reasons for this phenomenon were wide ranging:

- Natural: It is an age, when they get easily insulted, have fragile egos and weak minds, are immature and at an age when bright lights, fashionable things will attract them. He is not scared of his parents and teachers.
- Personal/individual: Weak inter-personal relations, no concern for society/country.
- Peers: Bad friends are a strong influence.
- Parents: Are too lenient, do not scold.
- Teachers – They do not guide the youth as they should. Teachers only teach them, they do not get emotionally involved. In rural areas parents complained that sometimes the teachers even ask children to get alcohol for them, do not teach, and beat the children after getting drunk (*daru pikar marte hain*).
- System – Unavailability of jobs, failed aspirations, failing in exams, large classes, irrelevant syllabus, English medium schools (disparate systems), reservation policy, stalling of the hill state of Uttarakhand, corrupt politicians.
- External factors: Excess money, market, dominance of TV/media/market. Absence of values except that of market economy. Lack of sensitivity towards other human beings.

“Padha Likha Kahan Fit Hota Hai?” (Where does the educated person fit ?)

Since it was found that with the exception of children and illiterate people, the rest made no distinction between literacy and education, the impact of education was explored by asking people to list the differences between a literate person and an illiterate person. A frequent complaint was the alienation of the educated. “The rural educated fits in a city, and an urban educated person fits in a foreign country” (*gaon ka padha-likha shahar mein, aur shahar ka padha-likha videsh mein fit hota hai*). No wonder the educated person is unable to make any contribution to society.

The illiterate articulated the pain and problems faced by the illiterates quite vividly. They said that illiteracy “was a curse,” they cannot “sit and talk in a group of literates”, “nobody asks us for advice”, etc. It was found that the lower the literacy the higher the expectations from literacy, some of them as overrated as the completely unfounded claim that the literate people could do anything: “*Jo chahe kar sakte hain; jahaj bhi chala sakte hain*”, that they never get angry (“*gussa nahin karte*”). Along with this the illiterates had a poor opinion regarding their own status: that they could not do anything, that they are foolish, that the literate can even cut grass better, the literate does everything properly (“*padha likha sab kaam dhang se karta hain*”). Apart from well-known merits of literacy like self confidence, being able to sign, read/write letters, go out, travel etc., the most overwhelming need for literacy was to prevent being tricked by others (“*thage nahin jaye*”). Most of the responses were linked to gaining self esteem, sometimes to simple pleasures like, “If my son is literate, then he will add ‘Shri’ before my name if someone asks him his father’s name.” Getting cheated is a recurring fear of illiterate people, which works as an important incentive to send their children to school. Yet they also say that it is the literate people who cheat.

The majority responses across all the groups, spoke of certain changes in behaviour, attitude and skill that distinguished the illiterate from the literate people. The only positive qualities in favour of the literate is that they have better literacy and communication skills. Although the illiterate believes that the literate ‘can do anything’, in fact the exact opposite is true. The majority perception is that the illiterate works very hard but earns very little, is the epitome of an ideal person - loving and considerate. However he has one drawback. He/she gets fooled and cheated by literate(!) people. An extreme comment made by one

LIG urban male, “*RDX ki tor phor padhe likhon ka kaam hai*” (Only literate people indulge in dangerous explosives like RDX etc.) The following responses make the distinction fairly clear.

- It was felt that the literate has more information, can read and write, but his knowledge is restricted to books, and the illiterate has more practical knowledge, and an expertise in some particular skill (“*kisi hunar mein top mein hote hain*”). The illiterate person also has a quicker grasp of things/facts.
- The illiterate has a sharper memory than his literate counterpart, as he has more opportunities for mental exercise and is not dependent on the written word.
- The illiterate person has no shame in doing any kind of manual work like taking care of animals, cleaning the house, cutting grass, working in the fields, picking up *gobar* and other loads, etc., while the literate is more inhibited regarding the kind of work he does. The word ‘standard’ recurs often in their responses (“*unhe standard ki naukri chahiye*”). The literate person is physically more weak, less capable.
- The literate person has less confidence in his abilities.
- The illiterate seems more satisfied with his lot and happier than the literate.
- The literate is less responsible and lacks discipline, whereas the illiterate person thinks of the future and the past (“*aage piche dekhta hai*”). The illiterate person is more responsible towards elders and family. The literate person does less work at home, likes to roam around, likes to rest more, dislikes physical labour, is lazy, prefers to earn a lot of money with minimum effort, and they like a lot of rest and leisure (“*unhe aaram chahiye*”).
- The literate person is selfish and greedy and wants good things (food, clothes and lifestyle). He/she aspires for consumer items and imitates the west. The literate person is more prone to individualism. The literate people have a greater tendency to drink, smoke, gamble, see films and generally spend a lot of money on entertainment.
- Every group felt that the present education system while teaching literacy skills also damages the ‘goodness’ in the student’s character. Compared to the illiterate the literate people are more arrogant, greedy, crooked, bad tempered, and less truthful and tolerant. The literate person tells more lies and indulges in more petty thefts, (*chori, dakaiti, ulta kaam*) than the illiterate person. The literate person is undisciplined, has less respect for the elderly, answers rudely, does what he pleases, orders people older than him/her, and speaks more abusive language.
- The illiterate persons in rural areas still consider their traditional occupation as an alternative to a job, but not so the literate person.

“*Kya isiliye padhaya tha?*” (Is this why you sent us to school?)

The inability of the educated to do manual work was a prime concern for all categories of respondents. It was also stated by most that education increases the feeling of inferiority towards working with hands, and this has far reaching effects upon their lives. The illiterates agree that working with hands is very important but it is not respectable. So though all illiterate and neo-literate rural men and women stressed the importance of working with hands especially in the fields they thought it was inferior work since working with hands does not get social prestige. There was one exception. The urban, low-income illiterate females were the only group that seemed very proud of the fact that they cut grass and take care of the cows as it made them independent of their in-laws, their *maliks* (masters) or husbands and they could provide milk to their children and family.

Working with hands, whether in the fields or in a craft, is considered inferior work and youth often say, “Is this why you sent us to school?” (“*kya isiliye padhaya tha?*”). HIG rural women commented that literate children often think: “*Mujhe neta banna hai, kahe ko katu ghas, kahe ko chalu hal, kahe palu bhans*” (I have to become a big man, so why should I cut grass, plough the fields or look after the buffaloes?).

The youth also differentiated between superior and inferior work and feel that superior work is that which is done as far from the house or village as possible and also one in which direct transaction of money was involved. A discussion regarding superior and inferior work revealed that superior work meant working outside the home, working with pen and paper, seated upon a chair; working with machines; without dirtying one’s hands; and in which direct transaction of money is involved. Literate people did superior work.

The rural illiterate women expected education to show a way out of their drudgery. They hoped that their children would not have to ‘cut grass and pick up *gobar* like us’.

While differentiating between illiterate and literate people, most of the participants, irrespective of the income group or region, felt that the illiterate people still have the ability to do manual work and they regard it as a skill which is sustaining our rural society. It was found that illiterate boys and girls were physically capable of working with their hands, but a literate person gets blisters on his hands (“*padhe likhe ke haath mein chale par jate hain*”). An illiterate person acquired some particular skill, and was not ashamed to work with his hands, and also did not need ‘good food, clothes, shoes’ as his needs were more basic.

CONCLUSIONS

The study showed that there was a gap between what parents expected the school to teach their children (in terms of values, ethics, behaviour, character building etc.) and what the schools were actually teaching. However, this link was not perceived directly by the parents. This gap was revealed when they discussed the impact of education on children.

The study revealed that there was a sense of deep disappointment in the way education is moulding the aspirations of the young in an unrealistic manner. While exploring the impact of education, phrases like *barbad ho gaye* (our children have been destroyed) in rural areas and *bigad gaye* (our children have become spoilt) in urban areas kept recurring all the time when parents referred to their children or present-day youth. All groups of urban parents and rural HIG parents regretted that education had inculcated the consumer culture among children. Parents said that children liked to go to the market, buy expensive goods, stay out of the house till late at night, and considered western people as their role models. This was in a way confirmed by children of an elite English school when they said that the role of a good school was to help a child migrate to the USA!

On the other hand, it was precisely to prevent children from getting spoilt, that most urban HIG parents, (who probably have the maximum choices,) withdrew their children after Class 8 from elite English medium schools and put them in government-aided schools. They felt that there was something wrong with the English medium schools, both girls and boys imbibe wrong (consumer) values and social behaviour.

Rural parents strongly criticised modern education. They felt it had alienated the children from the community and its belief systems which led to indifference towards land, family, culture and customs. The alienation of literate youth from their land, culture, and the feeling of inferiority towards physical labour is the most destructive aspect of the present education system. Rural youth refused to engage in agriculture or other traditional occupations and preferred instead to take up a job in urban centres. Migration has directly been linked to the spread of education. The problem does not stop here. The youth refuse to work on the land and instead migrate to cities in search of jobs. Not only are there not enough jobs available but given the poor quality of education that they have received they are in fact 'unemployable'. On one hand this fuels the rising unemployment levels in urban centres while on the other hand agricultural lands lie fallow due to lack of labour for cultivation.

Their perception of a literate person was most revealing. According to them a literate person was one who does less work, likes to uselessly roam around, is lazy, prefers to earn a lot of money with minimum effort, is selfish and greedy, only wants the good things of life, is more prone to individualism, has less affection for his family, has less respect for elders, and is not satisfied with what he has. There were other very serious aspersions on the impact of education. Many felt that education made people arrogant, rude, greedy, crooked, selfish, less truthful and intolerant. That it promoted individualism. That educated people become lazy, made them shirk work (*kaam chor*), it made them indulge in *ulta kaam (chori, dakaiti)*. Thus the parents' expectation of what children should be after being educated is very different from what they actually are, after being educated.

These are serious accusations against modern education, which were revealed through the responses of parents, perhaps in an indirect fashion. Although all, including the urban HIG parents seemed unhappy with the impact of education, yet no one had any positive suggestions on how to improve the system.

But despite disappointment with the education system, parents are still sending children to school. There seems to be general consensus on this. An important reason seems to be social pressure. They are sending their children to school because 'everyone does so'. Or because "What will our neighbours think?" Or

like an urban low income group 14-year-old child said, “I have never seen a single child between 5-10 years who does not go to school.” Even if we consider this claim slightly exaggerated, it is still an indication of how schools are a non-negotiable even in small towns.

Thus the major gap in our present education system has been the separation of values and ethics from classroom learning. Classroom learning has narrowed down to only imparting information to the exclusion of everything else. The people want a value-based education system that will make their children useful, productive members of society. What the education system has instead done is to alienate the children from their own society and family, and made them members of a market-driven, consumption oriented society. Education has failed to nurture human beings in the true and fullest sense of the term; instead it produces unthinking automatons, who can only fit into a consumer culture. These disappointments and frustrations of parents came out in the course of the study. It is abundantly clear that the present system is not attuned to the needs of the people. There is a need to explore and evolve a system which is relevant to the needs and aspirations of the people.

Discussion

The Two Roles of Education

There are two conflicting points of view regarding education. On one hand there is the utilitarian view of education which stresses on producing manpower in a competitive world. On the other hand there is the classical ideal of education as the development of an individual as an individual, beyond what is required by his vocational and civic role. One of the most significant finding of this study is that, by and large, our rural folk still believe in the classical ideal of education. Their demand for values as opposed to jobs and livelihoods was similar to what Gandhiji had said way back in 1916: "Education is not an end in itself but a tool. Education that strengthens our moral character is true education." Thus what the rural majority are asking for is 'true education'. But our education system has been veering more and more towards the utilitarian role and this trend has influenced the mindset and expectations of the literate people.

The study was originally designed to study people's perception about education and see how it varied with different categories like literacy, income, gender, and urbanisation. It was also our intention to see if there was a gap between their expectations from education or schools and the reality. Hence no questions were asked about values and ethics, but it came across very forcefully that all parents were deeply concerned about teaching children values and ethics. Parents, specially from rural areas and from illiterate and low-income groups, laid a lot of stress on inculcating values in children, and they also expected the schools to perform this role.

Integrity: *Hona* vs. *Dikhana* (Being vs. Appearing)

It is worth noting that the rural people, in particular the women, made a sharp distinction between internalising values and ethics and its external manifestation as behaviour and were more concerned about 'being' (*hona*) than 'appearance' (*dikhana*). In fact they hardly spoke about behaviour except in case of 'showing respect to elders'. They defined values and ethics in positive terms such as integrity, commitment and responsibility and related it to *dharma*. Responsibility was not meant in the sense of a 'burden', but more in the sense of a deep commitment.

On the other hand people in urban areas either defined values in negative terms – what is *not* to be done – or defined them in terms of appearance or behaviour. But perceived behaviour is not a true indicator of inner belief. A person may behave very politely but actually may not have any respect for the other person. The sharp difference between urban/rural and illiterate/literate responses is worth exploring further.

The manner in which the illiterate rural women distinguish between internal beliefs and behaviour and also ask for the same distinctions to be taught in schools ("*dikhane or hone ka fark samjhao*" – "teach them to distinguish between appearing and being"), is significant. That illiterate village women talk of integrity, faith and ethics in simple but operational terms speaks of a living and vital strength in the spirit of the majority of our people, which is a very encouraging thought, and this may give us a clue to the way to true empowerment.

It is important here to dwell on this point a little. When one starts giving more importance to behaviour or appearance then the source of one's strength/power shifts from within oneself to the outside. Because the yardstick by which one's value system will be measured, will now be the *effect* one's behaviour has on others. Hence the 'other' becomes the deciding factor, the touchstone by which one's values are measured. So, if one is able to bring about the desired effect by a hypocritical behaviour, without actually having or believing in the particular value system, then the purpose is served and the value is not important any more. What becomes important is what 'others' believe about oneself, and not how one

actually is. What happens within or what actually is, becomes secondary. Since the decision about one's value system shifts to the 'other' one ends up losing power, and as a consequence, confidence in oneself.

When values and ethics are defined in negative terms (not stealing, not lying etc..) only, it takes the form of restraints on behaviour which become a kind of minimum level to be achieved. This is the language of the police, of the law. The person is supposed to adhere to a minimum level and if the person falls below that level then there is the law to take care of him/her. This kind of value system cannot be conducive to building self esteem which is the hallmark of a strong society. In fact the negative definition of character can often become an end in itself. So the 'ideal' government servant is defined as one who does not *appear* to be corrupt. This is a tragedy not only for the nation but also for personal growth. In this case there is no challenge to draw out the best within the individual because appearances become important.

On the other hand if values and ethics are defined in positive terms like integrity, commitment, responsibility, etc. they are not only much broader and all-encompassing but they set a target for an individual to strive for higher goals. In this case appearances do not remain important, they take a backseat. If the stress is on what happens within, on '*hona*' rather than on '*dikhana*', if the stress is on responsibility, commitment and integrity, then the source of power stays within oneself. In this case the yardstick of measurement is one's own conscience and not the 'other'. This gives power and confidence to an individual.

The processes of urbanisation and education seem to shift the concern from '*hona*' to '*dikhana*'. Emphasis on 'appearance' or 'behaviour' alone leads to hypocrisy. Perhaps modern education has been laying emphasis on *dikhana* rather than *hona*. In this context it is worth taking note of what Gandhiji said while addressing the students at Allahabad on 30 November 1920. He tells them of his conversation with Lord Willingdon: "Lord Willingdon said that since his arrival from England he had not come across a single Hindu or Muslim who had had the courage to say "No". The charge is true even today. We have "No" in the heart but we cannot say so. We look at the other man's face to know whether he wants "Yes" or "No" and say what we think he would like us to say. Here, in this building, I could not make a little girl of three or four do my bidding. I asked her to sit on my lap, but she said "No". I asked her if she would wear khadi. She said "No". We do not have the strength which even this little girl has."¹

An illiterate rural woman expressed a strong commitment to ethical behaviour or *dharma* when she said, "*Mera avguna mujhe khayega*" (my bad qualities will destroy me). They expressed strong faith when they said, "*Meri baat poori hogi*" (whatever I believe will happen). This study shows that the strong belief that the rural people have in humanitarian values like integrity, honesty, sense of justice etc. gives them a certain strength of character and a strong sense of faith in a higher power. This faith was not a blind faith but was born of an inner conviction, of one's own inner strength, that if they led a life according to *dharma* (in the sense of ethical living), it will give them tremendous inner strength (*meri baat puri hogi, or dharmi ka ho bhala*). Honouring one's word (*vachan*) and the power it gives to the self was mentioned by rural women. The wisdom and confidence of these women is heartening in a world which is being consumed by the market. Many years ago Mahatma Gandhi in his speech at Muir College² in 1916, on economic versus real progress, said that by real progress we mean moral progress which is "nothing but the progress of the eternal faith (*shashwat vishvas*) within us." And later "...we can profit only if we keep our civilisation and our morals straight." On another occasion at the Second Gujarat Educational Conference on 20 Oct 1970 Gandhiji said, "All education must aim at building character. I cannot see how this can be done except through religion. We are yet to realise that gradually we are being reduced to a state in which we shall have lost our own without having acquired the new."³ During the course of this study the rural women repeated the same sentiments and faith.

This sense of faith was conspicuous by its absence among the urban and literate people. Again one is forced to wonder if our present education has something to do with erosion of values and faith in ourselves, because this study also points to the dis-empowerment and low self-esteem of the literate children. It is important to distinguish between relative and subjective confidence. Relative confidence derives its strength on the basis of the 'other' not possessing a particular knowledge, skill or information, while real confidence is not dependent on anything external but derives its strength from within - from one's intrinsic worth. There is a lack of real or inherent confidence among the educated in our country. Their apparent self-confidence is actually relative confidence. This relative confidence manifests as arrogance and reluctance to work with hands. Absolute confidence on the other hand is independent of what the other has or does not have. The wisdom of our illiterate women should make us think of a way to restore the lost wisdom and integrity from our system of education so that our children can also enjoy absolute confidence.

It seems that modern education has eroded real confidence and self-esteem instead of enhancing it. There are instances in our colonial past, which give some indication of how modern education and science was used as a tool to erode the confidence of our educated classes. Around 1875 Sir Richard Temple, the British Governor of Bengal felt that the teaching of science in India will help in curbing the confidence of the educated Indian. Writing to the then British Viceroy Northbrook, Temple observed, "No doubt the alumni of our schools and colleges do become as a class discontented. But this arises partly from our higher education being too much in the direction of law, public administration, and prose literature, where they may possibly imagine, however erroneously, that they may approach to competition with us. But we shall do more and more to direct their thoughts towards practical science, where they must inevitably feel their utter inferiority to us." Temple wrote this in 1875. In 1876, The Indian Association for the Cultivation of Sciences was established in Calcutta.⁴

It prompts one to wonder if our present education system, a legacy of our colonial past, is in some way continuing to perform the same role, that of breeding hypocrisy and eroding the confidence in people by focusing more on appearances rather than focusing on core values. Repeatedly in this study it came out that largely the urban, literate groups and males see the aim of education as getting a good job, and see the role of a teacher as being limited to helping a child get through competitive exams, which is in conformity with the utilitarian view of education. While the rural, illiterate groups and women were more in favour of the classical definition of education. They expect the schools to teach children about ethics and values, and feel that teachers will inculcate values by being role models themselves. This is a telling commentary on the mindset of literate people as compared to the illiterate people. It also shows the impact our education system is having on moulding our attitudes. As people move from illiteracy to literacy they forsake values and ethics and focus more on economic issues.

Education vs. Literacy

During the course of this study it became evident that other than the children and the illiterates all other groups made no distinction between literacy and education. Education and literacy were being used interchangeably. The fact that the distinction was made only by the illiterates indicates that modern education is responsible for blurring this significant distinction.

When the distinction between education and literacy gets blurred then literacy, which is to do with the skill of reading and writing gets an elevated status and education - which is much more than literacy - having to do with character building and acquisition of knowledge gets demoted. In the process traditional knowledge, wisdom, spiritual knowledge and religious teachings all lose their importance while literacy becomes the only yardstick of an educated person. In a country like India there are millions of men and women who still possess traditional knowledge in areas as diverse as medicine, health practices,

architecture, water divining, agricultural practices to knowledge about self-fulfilment, but most of them could be illiterate. If we - the products of modern education - consider them 'uneducated', then this mindset could have devastating consequences for all of us.

Livelihood vs. Job and Attitude to Manual Labour

Our study shows that the people in rural areas have started questioning the aim of education as it has failed to provide jobs to their children and their expectations are becoming more realistic and practical. Most expectations that were articulated did not relate to jobs and were demands from a system to provide something beyond jobs, which is a healthy sign. Perhaps this could persuade the policy makers into redefining education and making it more relevant.

The rural HIG group (with roughly 50 per cent of them being literate) is largely in favour of jobs, rather than traditional occupations. But with the increasing awareness about rising unemployment levels, they are reluctantly veering towards the view that their children should take up traditional occupations. Thus urban and literate people stressed more on jobs while rural, illiterates, and women stressed more on traditional occupations. The sharp criticism of job – *naukri ki jad pathar par* – and it being subject to vagaries of market forces and the hidden costs attached to a job by the rural women was most striking. However, at the same time they wished that education would reduce the drudgery of manual work.

In this study, the low income, rural people were found to be by and large, self reliant, both in economic as well as emotional terms. Since this group was directly concerned with the vital issue of survival they had a common sense approach to most issues. There was no confusion about what they meant by self-reliance. The illiterate LIG male group was the only group which did not have any expectations from their children, either financial, (they did not talk of jobs at all) or emotional (they did not expect that the children will look after them in their old age). They want their child to be self-reliant, which is defined by their child's knowledge about farming and animal husbandry. They expect their children to be observant about details and have a questioning spirit. The child must learn to observe and question details like why one of the bulls is walking slowly or why the cow is not having grass. The urban LIG men on the other hand express self-reliance in negative terms: "*Baap ki roti na tode*" (They should not live off me.) The urban illiterate women were most articulate in their criticism of their educated children. They were proud of the fact that they could work with their hands, and as a result, despite being illiterate, they could live better and be more self-reliant than their literate/educated children.

It was also significant that while the urban, literate lot were more concerned about their children doing well in competitive exams, the rural, illiterate people seemed concerned with 'understanding of concepts' and development of analytical skills. They wanted education to give skills to discriminate between right and wrong – not get swayed by latest trends and not get cheated – and the ability to make decisions. This was expressed as "*takkar na khaye*" or "*thage nahi jaye*" or "*sache jhutha ka bhed kar sake*". The phrase "*takkar na khaye*" (which literally means, should not have accidents) was repeated very often and its meaning goes well beyond the literal. It means that the child must have the power to discriminate between trusting the right or wrong person; between right and wrong. The distinction that they make between naivete and trusting with caution shows pragmatism of a very high order. Once again this underlines the different view points of the urban/rural, literate/non literate, and sometimes men-women and how it matches with the two views of education.

The rural people make a distinction between a job and a livelihood. A job usually means a desk job, being employed by someone else, while livelihood means self-employment and is usually linked to traditional skills and means working with one's hand. It is quite possible that urban people stressed more on jobs as the option of traditional livelihoods was not open to them any longer. But on the other hand we have the phenomenon of educated rural youth refusing to work on farms or to engage in their traditional

occupations. In fact they look down upon anything connected with their village, tradition and culture. That education lures people away from traditional occupations, and manual work towards the job market came across very strongly in this study.

The demand of rural parents to include teaching of traditional skills in the curriculum indicates that they are realising that education is failing in its professed claim of providing jobs and that it is not equipping them with the requisite skills required to get a job nor to be self-employed. This debunks even the claim of the utilitarian role of modern education. Rural parents lamented the fact that not only did education not provide jobs but also closed the option of youth going back to their traditional occupations. This was mainly due to two reasons: (i) School education breeds a sense of inferiority among the educated towards traditional occupations and manual work. (ii) Education also seemed to be making people incapable of manual work, "*Haath mein chhale par jate hain.*" The demand for teaching of traditional skills indicates the need of the people for an alternate livelihood to survive, which they see in the revival of traditional skills.

The inability of the literate to engage in manual labour was the prime concern of all rural categories. The same problem keeps surfacing in different words from different regions, from Jaunpur in the Himalayas to a small village near the Bay of Bengal. During a research project in Bangladesh⁵ on the relevance of education, when rural women of Mymensingh village were asked why they did not send their children to school, they had promptly replied: "Educated children do not work with hands. If we send our children to government schools, they stop listening to us. They will refuse to work in the fields. What will we eat then?" A similar reply was given to Prof. P.C. Joshi⁶ when he asked parents of illiterate children during his fieldwork in rural Uttar Pradesh why they did not send their children to school. Their reply was, "They will become 'Babu Sahibs' and refuse to go the fields." The same sentiments were echoed in this study by an illiterate woman from Jaunpur when she said: "I don't know whether our children will ever get jobs after school, but I know they will never go to their fields."

People stressed the importance of working with hands and said that the illiterate person was not ashamed to work with hands, but lamented that it had no social prestige attached to it. On the other hand education seem to breed a sense of shame in working with hands. During the study illustrations were cited where literate people preferred working as a teacher or an apprentice to a driver at a lower salary than was possible to earn as a manual labourer or a farm hand. Working with a pen (white collar job) or with machine (driver etc.) were preferred.

Of course these questions regarding the relevance of education have always been raised, from almost as early as the beginning of this century. In October 1916 Gandhiji's criticism of the present education system in *Samalochak* in Gujarati was: "Very little thought has gone into the meaning and objectives of education. The main objective is availing a job. We see children of the mason, the iron-monger, the carpenter, tailor, cobbler and of other occupations, attending schools. But after completing their education, instead of improving the quality of their traditional occupation, they look down upon it as inferior work and abandon it altogether. They consider it more prestigious to become clerks in offices. Even their parents think so."

Within the rural group there were different perceptions according to income and the literacy factor. It became clear that income and literacy clouds perception and prevents one from identifying self reliance as the key issue. Perhaps there could be a very good reason as modern education creates and increases dependence on jobs and the market.

The status given to desk jobs is the critical issue. It is significant that although the modern education system professed to raise awareness about the exploitative aspect in the traditional caste system of our

society, it hardly worked towards providing prestige or dignity to the occupations or crafts which were identified with different castes. Instead it gave dignity to clerical/desk jobs and in the process created another hierarchy – a new ‘jati’ of literate-superior (the *babus*, doing clerical work or those working with machines) and the illiterate-inferior (those working with their hands either in farms or engaged in traditional occupations). In the process the education system has created a false distinction between superior work and inferior work. It created the myth that superior work is that which is done ‘far way from home or village, which did not require working with hands and also one in which direct transaction of money was involved’. This is why the renowned national poet, Maithilisharan Gupt criticised modern education in his poem ‘*Shiksha ki Avastha*’ published in his book, *Bharat Bharati* when he said ‘*Dasatva ke parinam vali aaj hai shiksha yahan,*’ (our education breeds slavery) or ‘*bigade hamare ab yahan svadhin ke vyavasaya hain*’ (our traditional occupations which fostered independence were destroyed as a result of modern education).

The dominant model of education is from the west and alien systems do not work for a long time and definitely do not work for the majority of our people. It turns people into misfits and they have to leave their land, village, city and country in order to ‘fit’. Hence the brain drain. “Why blame our children?” said an HIG male parent. “It is the whole system. We were meant to be and still are slaves. Macaulay succeeded. Our education system makes our children misfits. They can only fit abroad in foreign labs. Because our universities do not have the facilities for which they are trained.”

In this context let us quote from Gandhiji once again. While speaking on the problem of education he said, “A gulf has been created between us and our families. To our parents, to others in our families, to our women, and to our domestics - with whom we live for the greater part of our time - our school education is as some hidden wealth. Its use is denied to them. It should be easy enough for us to see that where conditions are so unnatural the people can never hope to rise. If we were not mere pieces of blotting paper, after 50 years of this education we should have witnessed a new spirit in our masses. But we have no bond of understanding with them. They look upon us as modernised and keep away from us and we look upon them as uncivilised lot and despise them.” In the same lecture he went on to say, “There is no continuity between schools and homes in India... Our youths learn one thing from parents at home and from the general environment and another at school. The pattern at school is often found incompatible with that at home... The charge levelled against us by some Englishmen that we are mere imitators is not entirely baseless... As blotting paper absorbs the superfluous ink, even so we take in only the superfluities, that is the evils of western civilisation.”⁷

We have neglected the needs of the majority and have spread an education system that serves the needs of a privileged minority. It should have been the other way around. The needs of the majority are synonymous with the needs of the country and these should have been the deciding factor for our policy planners in education, for designing the school curriculum and training teachers. At the bottom of it all lies the feeling of inferiority towards one’s own culture and country. Unemployment is just the tip of this iceberg. Several studies have shown that there is no longer a guarantee of getting a job even after being a post-graduate. Several studies have shown that Kerala, which has the highest literacy rate also has the highest incidence of unemployment and suicide rate in the country. The unemployment levels are the highest among the educated⁸. Kerala also accounts for 50 per cent of all suicides in India⁹.

The findings of this study are in line with Gandhiji’s criticism of the present education system as early as October 1916 (*Samalochak* in Gujarati). He strongly felt that: “Very little thought has gone into the meaning and objectives of education. The main objective is availing a job... Education is not an end in itself it is a tool... Our education system has done just the opposite. Ninety-five per cent have become alienated from their traditions and are learning the ways of the 5 per cent.” It is a pity that despite having a leader of Gandhiji’s vision we decided to ignore most of his advice, with disastrous results.

The study showed that all the above issues were interrelated and education in some way was responsible for: a) developing an inferiority complex about one's own village, language, traditional occupation and manual work, b) creating a hierarchy of work where superior work was something done away from the village and where there was physical transaction of money and c) providing prestige to working with pen or machine.

The complex relationship between education, jobs and manual labour needs to be examined. The current system of education seems to alienate the young people from their land and occupation, (*"Your schools have certainly closed one door, that of returning to the fields."*) and made them full of contempt for anything local. At the same time the current education system prepares each student to be a good consumer, a slave of the market forces (*"The schools have taught our boys to roam around the market places, with their hands in their pant pockets, wanting good clothes, and good food."*). The market seems to be the ultimate goal of every student.

As an urban teacher stated categorically, "The current system of education is the greatest tool of science and technology which in turn is a tool of the market."

This sentiment was repeated during a seminar organised by SIDH in May 1999 on "The Philosophy and Politics of Modern Science and Technology", attended by a diverse group of participants from different fields like academics, politics, business, journalism and NGOs. At the end of this seminar there was a general consensus that there is an undeniable link between education and modern science and technology, and that:

- The entire system is based upon the perpetuation of a myth that the aim of science and technology is the greater good of larger numbers, while in fact it is just the opposite. It not only served the purpose of, and enriched only a very few, but also in the process widened the gap between the haves and the have-nots. So in effect it steadily dis-empowered and impoverished the large majority.
- Education is the most powerful tool for perpetuating the dominant paradigm. The sole objective of the current system of education is to transform the individual into an uncritical consumer.
- An alternative paradigm needs to be thought out, declared and disseminated in order to empower the marginalised majority.

In such a scenario where the international market dominates society, the demand of rural parents that their children become 'good and caring children' and learn to respect their elders may seem a little naïve. But the fact that the majority of people have accepted that schools are no longer connected to jobs, and are therefore asking for something else from schools is an encouraging sign. ("If you cannot give jobs at least make our children improve their behaviour towards us!"). In the last 50 years we seem to have come full circle. The market forces have marginalised the majority of the people outside its enchanting circle and this act is driving the people to question the most powerful tool of this system - the form and content of modern education. This climate of readiness for change gives an opportunity to our experts in education to redefine quality education, before plunging unthinkingly into improving access and perpetuating the same old system which has not only alienated but also eroded the confidence of our rural and urban youth.

Difference between *barbad hona* and *bigadana*

During the course of this study while the urban parents lamented that their children have become spoilt (*bigad gaye hain*) the rural parents expressed their despair in much stronger terms by stating that their

children have been completely ruined (*barbaad*) by this education system. This signifies that the impact of modern education in rural areas is much more devastating than in urban areas perhaps because in urban areas a certain amount of damage has already happened over the years.

In urban areas people have largely accepted the utilitarian role of education. They no longer expect their children to be self-employed as they have ruled out this option completely. The urban people have also learnt to access and exploit the larger socio-political and economic system to their advantage and prevent the majority living in rural areas from deriving the same advantages from the larger system. Hence they are only lamenting that the children have been spoilt which is manifested in (i) their rude behaviour towards their elders and (ii) in spending beyond their means.

In addition to the ill-effects of modern education being experienced by the urban people, in the rural areas the people are increasingly getting disenchanted with the utilitarian role of education. The job opportunities for rural people are far less than those for the urban people. They do not have the same access to the larger system to be able to derive the benefits. For instance, this feeling was expressed even by children in Bangladesh in one of the studies¹⁰ when they said, “An illiterate person works very hard in the hot sun and carries heavy loads on his head in exchange for almost nothing. We would like to be educated and enjoy life like the educated, so that we too can work less and get more money (*Beshi taka, alpo kaj*)”. What is implied is that they would also like to use education as tool of exploiting the system, just as the others had done before them. The rural people are slowly realising that modern education has weaned away their children from traditional occupations as well. Thus in rural areas education has wrought complete devastation leaving them neither here nor there.

Discipline, Rights and Responsibility

Almost every group raised the issue of discipline. Lack of discipline was a major concern. There were outer forms of discipline which were expressed as: having a fixed time-table in schools, time at which the school opens, coming to school on time, saying the morning prayers, regularity in coming to school, cleanliness, having a school uniform, wearing a clean uniform, etc. But there was a lot of emphasis on inner discipline by rural people.

All parents, both rural and urban, were unhappy that schools do not inculcate a sense of respect among children towards their elders - parents and teachers. There were many issues raised by the parents that are peculiar to the cultural beliefs of this country. For instance the issues of respect, care, concern and gratitude towards elders are not usually linked to discipline in other countries. Disciplining a child is considered part of learning by majority of the people in our country. All parents felt that the teacher must be strict and enforce discipline, although no one favoured beating children in order to discipline them. The majority also preferred the use of affection to motivate the child to behave better in class.

Today it is generally believed that inculcating love and a sense of responsibility is not a function of education, which means that the responsibility of building the social capital lies outside the schools. For instance when one says that, "Responsibility for value and social education which was traditionally given by adults in community is now passed to school,"¹¹ it is said in an accusing manner. But this conjecture is not entirely true. Both the teacher (school) and parents performed this role in the past. Even so, we must also appreciate that in the past schools were much closer to the community. They did not alienate the child from his/her family and community. Today if the school is alienating the child from family, society and traditions – as is borne out in this study – then it can not wash its hands from the responsibility of also giving values to the child just as the parents can not abdicate their responsibility.

At the same time it is also admitted that the moral and social values provide a base for society's development. What happens in effect is that there seems to be a clear divide between two responsibilities: that of providing skill and competency in literacy and numeracy, and that of building the character of the student (as it is regarded in the domain of 'social capital'). It is made out to be 'either-or' kind of situation, with an underlying assumption that the school cannot be made responsible for developing both the character and the 'learning competency' of the student. Today in rural areas, we have reached 'minimum' levels of expectations when parents say they are grateful if the teacher does not drink, smoke or lie in a drunken stupor during classes.

A country with an old tradition of *vidya* or learning; where *vidya* includes self knowledge as the most important part of learning; which aims at transformation of a human being from an instinctive, animal-like creature to a person with humane values working towards the realisation of self with self-discipline; where people revere the *guru* almost next to God; where the responsibility of the *guru* is an integral part of teaching; where the traditional pedagogy assumes that the role of the student is to question, and the *guru*'s to answer the questions; where the word for responsibility is '*uttardayi*' which literally means answering questions; such a society cannot be judged according to rules made by a society governed by a different set of values.

The emphasis of parents (of all groups) on discipline and obedience, but without beating the child, is significant in the context of the debate around child rights. The philosophy behind the modern concept of democracy propagated listening to the peoples' voices – 'participation' being its hallmark. In the context of the findings of this research, the issue of child rights seems to be in a bit of a conflicting situation vis-à-vis the opinion of parents as regards discipline. Perhaps we need to take into account the age of the child while tackling the issue of rights and discipline. It is worth quoting Gandhiji to clarify the point. In

his speech to the students and teachers at Surat on October 6, 1920 he beseeches the students: "On the right occasion, you can raise against me, your parents and the whole world... one should, if need be, sacrifice one's parents, relations and all others in *yagna* undertaken in real sincerity of heart as Prahlad sacrificed his father." Further on he says, "Your parents would say you should not leave schools and I say you should. If you understand that what I am asking you to do is your *dharma*, tell you parents respectfully that you can not attend your schools... What I say is not meant for students of 10 or 12 years of age. They are not free to think for themselves. They should do their parents bidding. According to our Shastras, a child should be lovingly reared for five years, should be disciplined for ten years – "disciplined" not with physical punishment but with instruction and persuasion, - and a son of 16 should be regarded as a friend." In the same speech he also says that, "Unless convinced no child has a right to disobey its parents"¹² . This can be the best position for us as regards the issue of child rights.

The issue of rights also cannot be seen as some kind of a culturally-neutral norm to which all cultures of the world have to subscribe. The concept of rights is ultimately linked to the cultural values and outlook of any given society. "Anthropologists, generally, have understood human rights as embedded in cultures and not as a norm which can be added on or 'reconciled with' a society's dominant values and institutions."¹³

It is important to understand that the issue of responsibility and rights have to do with two divergent views of society, the communitarian and the individualistic. Jayaprakash Narain in his *A Plea for Reconstruction of Indian Polity* says that, "One concept is the atomised, inorganic view that governs the political theory and practice in the west today. The most important reason for that is that western society itself has become, as a result of a certain form of industrialisation and economic order, an atomised mass society... The other is the organic or communitarian view. Even though not clearly expressed, it is implicit throughout Gandhiji's discussion on the subject. This view treats man not as a particle of sand, but as a living cell in a larger organic entity. It is natural that in this view the emphasis should be laid more on responsibility than on right, just as in an inorganic view it is natural that it should be the opposite. When an individual lives in a community with others his rights flow from his responsibilities. It cannot be otherwise. That is why, in Gandhiji's sociological thought, the emphasis is always laid upon responsibility."

Our traditional unit of society was the joint family, which in turn was part of a larger community, where the assumption of responsibility was unquestioned. Now with the breaking of that system in urban areas there is confusion. Most Indian adults have clear memories of joint families and as a result have internalised a different value system. But under the influence of the dominant western paradigm of modernity their children have moved towards the 'atomised' and individualistic worldview and away from the communitarian view. The modern education system has encouraged this view.

One needs to take into account the nature of society, before any intervention is planned or made, because if social issues are seen in isolation, without their cultural context, the interventions will not yield the desired result. We need to understand that our view of responsibility stems from seeing man as "a living cell in a larger organic entity," and not "like a particle of sand in an inorganic heap." The confusion and failure of our society is largely because we keep swinging between these two perspectives. We need to decide whether to give priority to the individual or the community? Should we subscribe to the worldview where a society lays more emphasis on responsibilities rather than rights or the other way round? Because when an individual lives in a community with others, his rights flow from his responsibilities. This is an important distinction to understand and arrive at a decision one way or the other so that we can pursue the chosen path without any confusion.

Decentralisation

The present study reinforces the need for decentralisation. There are many local issues that have far-reaching consequences on the enrolment and dropout rate of children.

All the rural parents say that the school should be near the village. In the hill villages this is the most important factor that affects the schooling of children. Even if the school is only 1 km. away, it could take a small child as much as two hours to walk to school because of the tough nature of the terrain. This means that a child has to be at least 10 years old, to be strong enough to climb up to the school. Having a school near home would not only boost the attendance of the girl child but would ensure that parents are able to keep a tab on what is happening in school, whether classes are being held regularly etc. This control of the local community over the school results in more effective supervision and monitoring of the schools. This step could obviate the need for an army of government school inspectors. Parents, especially rural, also spoke about the frequent absenteeism of teachers and hence were in favour of local teachers. Teaching in single-teacher schools is often hampered when the non-local teacher stays back in her/his own village or town, leading to closure of the school. This does not happen in the case of a local teacher. In the case of a local teacher it would be easy for the community to keep a check on the attendance of the teacher.

The rural parents complained that the teachers are not responsible, concerned or sensitive towards their students. Whether it is quality of teaching by making the curriculum more contextually relevant or building a good relationship with their students, it is significant that the rural people are demanding that the teacher be a role model. A local teacher is better suited for this. '*Ankh ki sharam*' or personal shame becomes important because the person who is from the locality, will be more receptive and more sensitive towards local pressures and issues. They are asking for 'guardian teachers' and not 'professional teachers,' and this is possible if the teachers belong to the local area. It was shocking that though the expectation from a school teacher – to be a role model to the students – was very high, both in urban and rural areas, the image of school teachers in many rural areas was poor: "*Daru pikar marte hain*". This can only happen when the teacher is from a different area and has no relationship with the local people. This was in a way a scathing attack on the monolithic government education system as prevails in the country.

Moreover if the teacher does not know the local dialect, he/she has problems of communication and is not able to explain difficult concepts to the students while a local teacher is easily able to do that. We all know that initial years of schooling must be held in the mother tongue. In India with so much of diversity, it is impossible to have printed material in each dialect, but we can certainly appoint local teachers to interpret the books in a more relevant manner. This again effectively enhances the quality of education imparted.

Rural parents have advocated the use of regional information and traditional wisdom and knowledge in the curriculum. This makes sense as presently the students fail to make connections between what is taught in the schools with life outside. Many subjects, certainly language, can be easily taught in primary schools, through the local context (themes such as local vegetation, trees, shrubs or villages - its history, geography, agricultural and cultural practices - can be the subjects around which language could be easily taught). Even certain concepts of maths, science, history and geography can be taught through information collected locally and knowledge gained from local sources. This is being effectively done in SIDH run schools where local youth are teaching. It is only possible in a de-centralised system of education.

In SIDH-managed primary schools, which are highly appreciated by the community, all teachers belong to the local community. None of them are 'qualified trained teachers' in the sense of holding a government certified B.Ed or BTC degree. But both in terms of student performance and preference of the community these teachers fair far better than their trained counterparts in government schools. This

finding is in direct conflict with the one of the core indicators as identified under EFA 2000 Assessment where having a 'trained teacher' is a positive indicator and a trained teacher normally means a teacher holding a government certificate irrespective of whether they are local or from outside.

Sometimes even common problems like teacher-pupil ratio take on another dimension at the micro level, more so in the context of mountain communities. In fact, in an area like the Jaunpur block or other hill village schools where the size of villages and hence number of students is small, the criteria of teacher-pupil ratio is irrelevant. The total number of students in a school can be as small as 20 to 25. But because these 20 students could be in as many as six classes, (from KG to class 5), a minimum of two to three teachers are needed. Thus each teacher could be juggling with two to three classes at any given time, which is a difficult task to accomplish by any means. So although the teacher-student ratio may be 1:15 or even lower, still the number of classes a teacher may be handling could be a major problem affecting the quality of teaching. Hence a low teacher-pupil ratio does not necessarily translate into better quality teaching. But there is myth being created around teacher-pupil ratio. In fact this is one of the 18 'core indicators' identified under EFA 2000 Assessment. The assumption that a low teacher-pupil ratio indicates better teaching is completely wrong at least as far as the mountain regions and other remote areas are concerned. Since the situation differs from place to place, it is inappropriate to have a standardised set of indicators for every place.

Disparate Systems

The wide disparity between urban and rural needs (need for computers versus need for benches and reading material) and availability of infrastructural facilities shows that despite avowed declarations like 'Education For All By 2000' we still have not fulfilled the most basic needs of rural areas. This shows the glaring rural-urban inequity of the present education system. Even within urban areas the inequity in the education system is reaching vulgar proportions. Five star meals in airconditioned classrooms at one end and bare rooms with no furniture, toilet facilities or teachers at the other end. Rural schools are still short of basic necessities like proper buildings, proper seating arrangements, adequate number of teachers, reading-learning material etc. On the other hand the demand in urban schools is for things like computers, library facilities, and hobby classes. Recently there is a clamour for sophisticated teaching-learning technologies in urban schools in the name of 'smart schools'. This trend only serves to increase the disparity in the education system instead of reducing it. This disparity is creating false aspirations among the under privileged and at the same time the schools catering to the privileged are not producing students who are making any worthwhile contribution to the society or the country.

In fact the HIG parents of the privileged classes have shown great dissatisfaction with the way their children are shaping up in the elite schools. The fact that parents in Mussoorie who have been sending their children to the elite schools remove them in higher classes to put them in local schools is one of the most significant finding of this study. It not only indicates dissatisfaction with the education system but is also a reflection of the increasing disparity in this country, at every level (within HIG, MIG and LIG and between HIG and LIG). Among the HIG there are people who can afford to pay a fee of more than US\$ 10,000 per annum (Rs. 4.5 lakhs per annum at Woodstock, Mussoorie) at one end and at the other end there those who are somehow managing to pay Rs.18,000 per annum. The children coming from these two ends of the spectrum are not able to compete with one another in the acquisition of consumer items and exploitation of resources thus giving rise to discontent and unrealistic aspirations even among the HIG.

Materialistic aspirations of the LIG and rural people are normally moulded by the urban HIG. This is the reason that in this study we find that while talking of the schools, the rural/ urban, LIG/HIG are all in alignment in their expectations from schools which are mainly materialistic or quantitative in nature – the difference is mainly of degrees. But a sharp difference emerges when they talk about their expectations

from children, because these expectations are more qualitative in nature. Here we see that their views are diametrically opposite – one (the LIG, rural, women) veering towards the classical and the other (the HIG, urban, men) towards the utilitarian view of education. The confusion shows up when we see a sharp difference between their expectations from the school and expectations from the products of these schools i.e., the children. While the elite mould the aspirations of the majority, there is also a lot of confusion within them, otherwise why would they withdraw their children from expensive English-medium schools, in higher classes, and put them in Hindi-medium schools. But this confusion seems to be much more among the rural literate and urban MIG and LIG groups.

The HIG and MIG parents felt the need to have a proper school dress and daily school prayer. This shows that for this class the external, physical elements are more important than what is actually being taught. This was also revealed in other ways (as discussed before) as they laid no stress on internalising values and gave importance to outer forms of behaviour. Even their expectation from teachers reveals their mindset. Their only expectation from the teachers was that they should help their children get through competitive exams. As literacy and income levels rise people forsake core values and focus more on economic issues. This again points to how education plays a role in moulding aspirations.

Even the rural LIG parents can be seen veering towards this view. This indicates that the economically lower rung of society tends to imitate those above it. Literacy, of course, also plays a role in this. The illiterates do not seem to be so enamoured by the external elements as their literate counterparts. This tendency of the literate coupled with the increasing disparity in education system (rural one teacher schools with inadequate facilities on one hand and ‘smart’ air-conditioned schools on the other) must be a cause of far greater concern for the policy makers than it seems to be at present. A similar study on perspectives of community done in Bangladesh in 1998 revealed this clearly. Most children when asked to make drawings of the literate and the non-literate, drew a literate man wearing a tie and coat and an illiterate man carrying heavy load on his head. When asked to define an educated person the prompt answer was a person who earns more but does less work. The kind of aspirations and values nurtured and manifested by the privileged section of our society are also responsible for the poor quality of education.

In India, as in all third world countries with a colonial past, the most coveted schools are the English medium schools, which are also more expensive than the government schools. The importance of teaching English was another issue that was a common expectation from a good school. It was taken for granted by the urban HIG, but every other group considered it as ‘the key to open all doors (of success)’. The issue of English was considered crucial to good schooling by all categories. Wherever multiple standards exist in the education system, programmes for the underprivileged are perceived both by them and by others as lying at the bottom of the heap. An alien system, which gets state and social recognition, serves two purposes. On the one hand, people lose confidence and the will to sustain their own indigenous system, as it is perceived to be an inferior system. On the other hand, they find themselves incapable of managing the new (alien) system, which is perceived as superior. Multiplicity in education standards - as opposed to diversity - thrives on disparity or inequality. As John Ruskin once said ‘the force of the guinea you have in your pocket, depends wholly on the default of a guinea in your neighbour’s pocket’.

The disparity in education sustains itself on the myth that the expensive urban middle class English oriented education system is beneficial and achievable for all. And even if it seems remote, it is still coveted by all communities who have increasingly less and less confidence in their own system. Community participation and support is essential for a good school, but this support is possible only when people have faith in their systems, not when they are forced to accept a system reluctantly in the absence of an alternative, which they desire. Community support for even good initiatives in rural and slum areas is half-hearted because parents see these schools as a last resort. Given the opportunity they would rather put their children in a school which appears like the elite school (English medium, with western dress code etc.).

In this context the profoundly disturbing questions are:

- How can education be sustainable without the widespread commitment and support of the community, that too in a systemic sense; not purely in a monetary sense?
- Is community support possible without reducing disparities? ¹⁴

The study also gives an indication as to why we as a nation have become imitators, who copy without thinking, which leads to confusion. They all want to copy the same external elements, the paraphernalia but are dissatisfied with the product coming out of this system. They are disappointed that education is not getting them a job, yet they are not rejecting the system. The confusion seems to be more among the literate. Our education system perhaps plays a very vital part in this. One is reminded of Gandhiji once again. Gandhiji said in a speech¹⁵ to the students at Agra on 23 November 1920: “We are dazzled by the shining lustre of our chains and look upon them as symbols of our freedom. This state (of mind) bespeaks slavery of the worst kind”. At another time while speaking at the Second Gujarat Educational Conference Gandhiji says, “Our graduates, therefore, are a useless lot, weak of body, without any zest for work and mere imitators. They suffer an atrophy of the creative faculty and of the capacity for original thinking, and grow up without the spirit of enterprise and the qualities of perseverance, courage and fearlessness. That is why we are unable to make new plans or carry out those we make.”¹⁶ The students are mesmerised into thinking in a fixed pattern and encouraged to produce ‘standard’ answers (some copy straight from books or guides others learn by heart and reproduce) and later on in life this gets transferred when they adopt the same pattern of mindless imitation.

Rhetoric and Reality: ‘Us’ and ‘Them’

Unfortunately the current paradigm negates issues of values and ethics in education. This can be seen if we look into any educational research work. A recent report on basic education in India (PROBE 1999) is one such example. It calls education a social goal. It says that we should not lose sight of the fact that education is more than schooling and that we should not restrict “the focus of education policy to total literacy and that education is a much broader and demanding social goal”. It speaks of Tagore’s stress on reflection and its being absent from standard curriculum. It also regrets that there is a tendency to stress on “acquiring specific mental skills that happen to be valued in the modern economy and society.” Yet having said all this, the report hardly makes any qualitative critique of the present education system and makes no attempt at evaluating it in the light of the aforesaid. It claims that its findings are based on fieldwork, that it is not a public report but a ‘people’s report’. Yet one finds that the ‘critical’ perception of the school environment is unfortunately limited to only four areas of concern: the physical infrastructure, teacher resources, classroom activity patterns, and social discrimination at school. Nowhere do we see the concern for actualising education as a social goal, except in the area of social discrimination. There seems to be an assumption here that social goal is limited to removing caste and perhaps gender discrimination only. But this is a very narrow view and social goals defined this way are not a positive way of setting larger goals of education. By limiting the research to four areas, of which only one can claim to have any link with the larger goals of education, the scope of the report gets narrowed down considerably. The responses will automatically be confined to the four areas as specified by the research team. Responses in other areas not spelt out, get left out, but these areas may be extremely important if we look at them from the perspective of the classical definition of education as propounded by Tagore and Gandhiji.

Our study shows that people are deeply concerned about larger issues of education. But the PROBE report which claims to be a ‘people’s report’ has made sure that people’s voices as regards larger issues will automatically get eliminated because it is beyond the scope of their study. With the resources at their

disposal and the access that they have to the academia and the media they have a very wide reach but such efforts do great harm by claiming to be 'people's report', which they certainly are not.

Value education is essential if education as a social goal is to be actualised. At the end of the report it seems that the issues of quality and relevance in education are subordinate to the issue of access and quantity (numbers).

Another problem that commonly afflicts such public reports on education is the gap between the rhetoric and the reality. Like many others of its kind, the report claims that it is written 'from the standpoint of the underprivileged; especially the millions of children who are excluded from the schooling system, and their parents'. The assumption seems to be that the education being provided to the 'underprivileged' even though lacking in quality, is still worth providing. No effort is ever made to probe the experiences of the higher income group or the elite or the elite schooling system, as if everything is all right with the elite system. If so then in effect we are giving more importance to the external elements, the infrastructure, the quantitative, the measurable only and not to values or the qualitative factors. And thus talking about quality, 'reflection in curriculum', values, is mere rhetoric.

Since colonial times we have divided the world between 'them' and 'us', once again not realising that the two are interrelated. The elite schools are the role models for all people regardless of class and rural or urban areas. There is also an assumption that the education imparted in the privileged schools is what is needed and all would be well if that could be replicated. In short, what is implied is that the problem is only of access, not of quality. This study takes a different position.

It is high time we took notice of the consequences of an alien system of education in a country like India. The greatest tragedy has been the complete alienation of our elite from the real problems of this country and its large majority, due to the fact that the elite speak and think in an alien tongue divorced from the rural majority. Most of them are so busy imitating the powerful west, that they are perhaps ignorant of their unintentional collusion (one hopes it is not intentional) with them. It is these alienated people who make policies for the rural majority. No wonder, nothing seems to work.

Concurrence of Views - Gandhiji and This Study

Gandhiji's criticisms against the colonial system of education were primarily based on the negative effects of western education on Indian people and society. He was particularly concerned with the negative implications of the use of English as the medium of education, and the lack of relevant education for the rural masses. He felt that rather than leading towards a more free and just society, education was increasing polarisation and producing lazy, uncreative, self-centered and culturally alienated individuals. Gandhiji was also highly critical of equating education with economic gain. While he agreed that a good education must lead to economic freedom, he saw that the colonial system was only creating unreal and undesirable aspirations towards certain kinds of occupations, rather than addressing the realities of the majority engaged in traditional forms of livelihood.

The findings of the study are in general agreement with Gandhiji's overall negative impression of a literate person. Confirming Gandhiji's line of thought, it was perceived that an illiterate person is more satisfied with his lot and happier than a literate person. The study also confirms Gandhiji's opinion that modern education is most inappropriate for rural India. The rural participants tended to view education as more destructive than constructive, as it has neither taught their children to be able to earn a livelihood in their traditional occupation, nor given them the skills to get a job elsewhere.

Gandhiji devoted much attention to the implications of education being imparted in English, a foreign language. He was aware that a language is much more than a means of communication: it is a means of

cultural conquest, a tool of power, and a reflection of a community¹⁷. It is an issue that affects all levels of society - from the self-conception of the individual to social, economic and political relationships between classes and castes. It is a personal question of identity and a political one of access to knowledge in a society. English is still a language of power in India; it is the medium of the elites, higher education and global communications. All the urban children in the study saw the teaching of English as an important requirement for a good school. Thus Gandhiji's considerations of language as a part of his critique of colonial education continue to be of relevance even today.

In the context of British rule in India, Gandhiji recognised education and language as important tools of cultural conquest¹⁸. They break down bonds of family, culture and society and replace these commitments with a belief in the benefits of modern Western culture. It is an insidious form of ideological conquest, probably more paralysing than rule by violence. Gandhiji saw that it created an inability to discriminate between the good and bad of one's own and Western cultures, resulting in a confused process of identity construction. And, most importantly, a sense of fear, inferiority and lack of identity prevents people from being able to envision and act toward alternatives based on their own traditions¹⁹. In the present context, education, particularly in English, is clearly a means of perpetuating Western consumer culture. This was confirmed by the study.

The use of a foreign language rather than the mother-tongue to convey knowledge therefore affects the psyche of the individual and his relationship to society. The exclusion of one's language and culture from the school realm contributes to a feeling that these are inferior and unscientific. The continuity which should exist between the knowledge of home and school is broken, leaving individuals with a 'segregated intellect'. Instead of developing creativity in individuals, education in English was producing mere imitators. The results of this study confirm that there is an on-going process of intellectual and emotional segregation and alienation as a result of education in a language other than that spoken at home. Urban MIG parents saw English-medium education as the main reason why their children had become alienated from their families. Confirming Gandhiji's perception of the important link between language and values, it is interesting that the study found a trend among HIG parents who initially send their children to elite English-medium schools, then withdraw them after class eight or ten and enroll them in Hindi-medium schools. They felt that this was a way to check the influence of consumer culture and instill the right social 'values', especially in girls.

Gandhiji realised that the power-relationships implied by education in English, and the social divide between those educated and uneducated was bound to have negative social consequences. It creates a view of the 'other' based on contempt and suspicion, and inevitably counteracts the possibilities for just governance and positive social change²⁰. For example, Gandhiji pointed out that India is not, as is often stated, lacking in organisational ability; disorganisation is rather a consequence of the inability of the educated elite to communicate with the masses. There is a lack of correlation between the represented and the representatives. This, as Gandhiji clearly realised, points to a direct link between *appropriate* education and an effective and just system of governance. In fact, Gandhiji felt that if education had been imparted through the vernacular language instead, Panchayats would have been a living force of self-governance²¹.

Modern education has generally been perceived as a means of gaining employment opportunities. Gandhiji was opposed to this equation. There is a contradiction between the modern system's insistence on the relationship between education and employment, and the fact that students do not leave school with skills that could guarantee a livelihood. There is no attention given to learning about agriculture and crafts, though these are primary occupations in India. Gandhiji asked how could education benefit us if it makes clerks out of all of us. He pointed out that even as early as the 1930s, higher education, particularly

in the arts, was in fact creating unemployment in certain circles. In producing aspirants for desk-jobs, youth were being alienated from their traditional occupations and cultural contexts. Instead of returning to and improving on their traditional vocations, educated youth see them as being inferior and will not return to them even when they fail to gain the desired jobs.

The underlying ideologies are so powerful that even though education is creating unrealistic aspirations and unattainable goals, there has not been a widespread process of social questioning. Only those most severely affected are raising questions about the value of prevailing education, for example parents in Jaunpur.

Gandhiji raised questions countering the beliefs that connect education and development²². He realised that inappropriate education can lead to a perception of living a life of poverty and therefore unhappiness. He provided the example of a peasant who lives in harmony with his environment and neighbours, who knows and follows rules of morality in his life. But he is illiterate. What is modern education going to do for him? Will it increase his happiness? Or make him unhappy with his lot? Gandhiji felt that he has no need for such an education. Do people need an education which is going to make them perceive themselves and cultures as 'backward' and 'poor'?

Gandhiji felt that a major fault with modern education was that it places all emphasis on the development of the intellect or mind, creating a systemic bias toward mental work over manual work. Education therefore becomes a means of glorifying 'clean' desk/office work rather than teaching children the dignity of all forms of labour. This, as Gandhiji pointed out, is particularly detrimental in a country where a majority of people are traditionally occupied with agriculture. The respondents of this study voiced the same concern regarding the inability of the educated to do manual work and the impact of this attitude in their lives. People realise the importance of manual work, but felt that it was not socially respectable, a perspective which modern education perpetuates. Gandhiji felt that it was wrong to use the intellect to earn a living. Manual labour should be the source of sustaining one's physical needs, and intellect should be used for uplifting the soul and serving humanity²³.

Gandhiji also talked about the lack of appropriate teaching methods and text books. He felt that in India it was essential that priority was given to basic primary education rather than specialised higher education. Children generally learn about far-away places and events rather than their own surroundings. This reinforces a devaluation of the local context in the child's mind, and thereby contributes to the feeling of inferiority. Subjects are taught in a compartmentalised and abstract manner, making it difficult to connect them to experienced realities. There is also an excessive focus on exams, leading to a focus on superficial memorisation of facts, and unnecessarily creating stress and fear in children.

Gandhiji saw text books as generally being useless, and often even harmful. They did not encourage the child to think and made the teacher's task mechanical. They usually did not include anything of local relevance and increased alienation and lack of pride in the child's surroundings. In his discussion of text books, Gandhiji felt that education seemed to be a means of 'weaning a child from his traditional culture'²⁴. The best solution according to Gandhiji was to do away with text books all together²⁵.

Conclusions

There is a very strong link between the larger socio-political climate at the macro level prevailing in the country and the education system (from rural schools to elite schools and even upto the university level). The macro system impacts the education system which in turn supports the larger system. "According to Gandhiji overdependence on democratic national government was slavery in disguise, although he agreed that the state could not be abolished totally. He believed that the tasks and responsibility of the state

should be reduced to the minimum. According to him spread of education should result in shrinking of the State. Education that expands the State's responsibilities and machinery is no education"²⁶. This is precisely what the present system has been doing - expanding the State's responsibility and machinery. This is one of the main reasons why relevant experiments by Gandhiji or Tagore, which challenged the larger socio-political system, did not succeed.

Krishna Kumar²⁷ has analysed how government policies limited Gandhiji's Bunyadi Shiksha to small pockets of experiments and soon wiped out from public memory. "In fact Kothari Commission or the Education Commission's Report in 1966 laid stress on linking education and national development by saying that it envisaged a change in the attitudes and values of 'the whole people' under a socio-cultural revolution oriented towards modernisation. It is clear that the faith in scientific temper and modernisation were unshakable and this is despite paying lip service to Gandhiji. The first three Plan documents discussed Bunyadi Shiksha and basic primary education with enthusiasm. However, the draft outline of the fourth Plan published in August 1966 has just one line mention of basic education. In fact the word basic education was replaced with the word work experience. Later the setting up of national and central bodies like NCERT consolidated the national elite and the grant of freedom to it to transcend the constraints of local or provincial socio-economic realities. It also marked the end of de-centralised planning in education, which was, essential to Gandhiji's approach.

"Phasing out of basic education is explained by a commentary in the Education Committee Report which says that basic education is deficient in two respects: in getting confined to certain crafts, and two, in being incompatible with the promotion of science and technology. The general and academic elementary education programme recommended by the Education Commission in the mid-1960s in place of basic education certainly proved detrimental to the spread of education in rural India. The persistence of a high drop-out rate, with almost no change in over three decades which have passed since the submission of Education Commission, is a proof of this conclusion, although its detailed verification must wait for further research."

The findings of this study prove without a doubt that the present education system has failed in all respects. It fails to fetch economic returns as it does not help one to get a job. It fails in the area of social returns as the literate person contributes very little to society. It completely fails to make the educated person give his parents or family any kind of emotional or financial support. This is confirmed eloquently by Prof. Saran, who after a long career as a university teacher, made a proposal for an alternative school, in his book *Illuminations: A School for the Regeneration of Man's Experience, Imagination and Intellectual Integrity*: "Independent India has maintained a profound continuity with the British Indian system of education. The British, it could be argued, designed it perhaps with the purpose of perpetuating, in one way or another, the loss of the Indian's dignity; in any case, the system did not embody any concern for the restoration of his dignity. Further, there is the conviction that the ruling elite of independent India inherited from its former Masters the task of strengthening the inertia and promoting intellectual degeneration and it clings to this alien heritage with a vengeance; it is clear, therefore, no matter how loud and persistent our talk of radically changing the inherited educational structure, there is no prospect whatsoever of any real transformation being effected by the ruling party and cultural elite... From our colonial days we have been taught that as a people we are wanting in, and indeed, forever, incapable of any theoretic consciousness. By some strange magic of the White rule, we continue to hold fast to this belief about our talent and possibilities..."

We seem to have come a long way from a culture which defined education as *sa vidya ya vimuktaye* as a liberating process. Education has been called by many as both an instrument of enslavement and an act of liberation. At present it is obviously being used as a tool to become 'mental slaves'. To understand the crisis of education one has to start from the basic axiom that as an organised social activity it is an

intrinsic part of the greater social structure. The rules of the game are the same as those in the world outside. Education should not merely be a process of '*shiksha*' or training to become a 'model' citizen, serving the interests of the ruling class. Its conversion into a process of acquiring '*vidya*' (learning/knowledge), skills as well as concepts is necessarily an act of subversion²⁸ .

SIDH also believes that if education can become the most powerful tool of the dominant western paradigm then surely it can also help in turning the tide. If education can change desires and aspirations of a society towards consumerism, then, if one tries it could consciously turn society towards upholding humanitarian values. And as Prof. Saran says : "Excess of chloroform is our fate. Our fate, yes, but perhaps not our destiny. So long as there are survivors, there is hope. So long as children are born, there is hope... we hope and pray that there will arise an intellectual group, particularly from among the youth, that will slowly and steadily become aware of our wretchedness as a people and the necessity of a dignified and courageous response to it."

Gandhiji was also hopeful in 1916 that, "It is not difficult to change the present trends of education. Public opinion must be in favour of this change. The government will have no option but to introduce these changes." This study proves without doubt that today public opinion is in favour of a radical change in education. And it is with the same hope that an alternative model of education has been conceived and proposed within SIDH. A space, called *Bodhigram*, for like minded people to explore and redefine education to bring it closer to our culture and the need of our country today. And a place where young leaders can unlearn false teachings, become sensitive, dignified and courageous.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are being made, based upon the results of this study, for policy makers and educationists, in order to make their interventions meaningful and effective.

1. This study needs to be duplicated in other regions also. These studies should try to ascertain, among other things, the following: (a) Impact of education on children (b) Whether education plays a role in alienating the child from family, society, traditions, etc. (c) Whether education has taken people away from their traditional occupations, and if so has it provided them with an alternative (d) Whether there is a contradiction between people's desire for a value-based education for their children and their demands from schools. Many other issues may also be explored.

If the conclusions of other studies are in line with the present study then there is a need for advocacy for making the education system more relevant before talking about increasing access.

2. There is a strong case for de-centralisation of the whole system. Giving the community more say in deciding the kind of education they want will not only improve the quality but also reduce the burden on the State. Issues like location of school, recruitment of teachers, terms of employment and curriculum can be devolved to the community, at least upto the primary level.

3. Incorporating traditional skills and indigenous knowledge systems in the curriculum will impart enough skills to the child to enable him to earn his livelihood. This will reduce his dependency and anxiety related to jobs.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ *Collected Works of Mahatama Gandhi*: Vol XIX pp 46-47
- ² *Collected Works of Mahatama Gandhi*: Vol XIII pp 310-317
- ³ *Collected Works of Mahatama Gandhi* Vol XIV pp 29
- ⁴ (India Office Library: MSS Eur C 144/17, Sir Richard Temple to Lord Northbrook, 18.2.1875.) Quoted by Sri Dharampal in his lecture 'Eighteenth Century Indian Science and Technology: Their Present Relevance' at the Birla Museum of Science and Technology, Calcutta, 1986.
- ⁵ Joshi Anuradha, (July 1998) *Shiksha Chitro*, Save The Children Foundation (UK), Bangladesh
- ⁶ Joshi P. C. (August 1999) 'Gandhi ki Arthik Dristhi' in *Samayik Varta*
- ⁷ *Collected Works of Mahatama Gandhi* Vol XIII, pp 298
- ⁸ Kannan K.P. (1998) 'Political Economy of Labour and Development in Kerala' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XXXIII No. 52
- ⁹ Jayapal Pramila, (1995) 'Kerala a Development Model?' *ICWA Letters*; PJ-3 SOUTH ASIA
- ¹⁰ Joshi Anuradha, (1998) *Shiksha Chitro*, Save The Children Foundation (UK), Bangladesh.
- ¹¹ Nair Deepika (1999) *Education in a Conservative Society—Perspectives of Children and Adults*, OSCAR (Kathmandu).
- ¹² *Collected Works of Mahatama Gandhi*: Vol. XVII; pp 328-333
- ¹³ Blanchet Therese (1996) *Lost Innocence, Stolen Childhoods*, University Press Ltd. Dhaka
- ¹⁴ Gupta Pawan (1998) 'Unlearning to Learn' in *The Pioneer*, April 12
- ¹⁵ *Collected Works of Mahatama Gandhi* Vol XIX pp 16
- ¹⁶ *Collected Works of Mahatama Gandhi* Vol XIV pp 14-15
- ¹⁷ Refer *Collected Works of Mahatama Gandhi* Vol. XIV, pp 8
- ¹⁸ Refer *Collected Works of Mahatama Gandhi* Vol. LVII, pp 138
- ¹⁹ Refer *Collected Works of Mahatama Gandhi* Vol. XIV, pp 8
- ²⁰ Refer *Collected Works of Mahatama Gandhi* Vol. XIII, pp 297
- ²¹ Refer *Collected Works of Mahatama Gandhi* Vol. XIII, pp 219
- ²² Refer text of *Hind Swaraj* in *Collected Works of Mahatama Gandhi* Vol. X
- ²³ Refer *Collected Works of Mahatama Gandhi* Vol. XIV, pp 131
- ²⁴ Refer *Collected Works of Mahatama Gandhi* Vol. XXI, pp 38
- ²⁵ Refer *Collected Works of Mahatama Gandhi* V.24, pp 486
- ²⁶ Lecture delivered by Dayal Chand Soni at Shikshantar, Udaipur, 'Education Today and Tomorrow in the Context of Gandhian Basic Education' (25.11.99)
- ²⁷ Kumar Krishna (1996) 'Agricultural Modernisation and Education – Contours of a Point of Departure' in *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol XXXI No. 35,36 and 37
- ²⁸ Singh, H. (May 1998) 'Shiksha, Yes! Vidya, What Vidya?' *Sunday Tribune*.

APPENDIX 1

Study Area

The survey was conducted in the Jaunpur Block of Tehri district. Jaunpur is a tribal block in the north-west part of Tehri district and is about 20 kms from Mussoorie. The local population mainly comprises of the *Khasa* community who claim to be descendents of the Pandavas, the legendary heroes of the epic Mahabharat.

Characteristics of Jaunpur

Jaunpur has 259 villages organised into 89 gram sabhas. The villages are small, scattered, and thinly populated (consisting of 12-50 households). Villagers have small landholdings, terrace cultivation is the only option and the economy relies largely on agriculture and animal husbandry. Although there is a government school in every gram sabha, because of the small size of hill villages, a gram sabha could mean a cluster of 6-7 villages. Very often the nearest school could well be a 3-hour climb, which is physically demanding for a small child. This leads to high drop-outs. In the case of girls because of the time spent away from home they are discouraged from attending school. A few schools run by SIDH and Shishu Mandir are the only private schools in the area. Literacy level in Jaunpur is 16 per cent for women and 62 per cent for men .

Basic Statistics About Jaunpur

Demography

Area (in sq. km.)	485
No. of inhabited villages	252
Total Population	50,337
No. of Households	8,249
Male Population (%)	50.65
Female Population (%)	49.35
SC Population (%)	18.84
ST Population (%)	0.61
Population density (persons/sq.km.)	104

Literacy Figures

Total Literacy (%)	38.9
Male Literacy (%)	61.46
Female Literacy (%)	15.36
No. of govt.primary schools	126
No. of teachers in primary schools	181
No. of female teachers	31
SC/ST students in primary schools (%)	11.35

Basic Amenities

No. of PHCs	3
Allopathic Hospitals & Dispensaries	4
Family and Child Welfare Sub-Centre	17
Veterinary Hospitals	5
No. of electrified villages	202
No. of post offices	21
No. of villages having piped water supply	248

Sources: Census of India 1991, Sankhiki Patrika 1993 and Education for All 1993.

APPENDIX 2

Target Group

The sample consisted of teachers, parents, and children from urban and rural areas. The teachers were selected from both government and private schools. Parents of children studying in secondary school (Class 6-10) were selected. Parents were divided into three categories: Low Income Group (LIG), Middle Income Group (MIG) and High Income Group (HIG). For urban areas a household having a monthly income less than Rs. 7,500 was grouped under LIG. . A household having monthly income between Rs. 7,500 and Rs. 15,000 was classified as MIG. A household having monthly income of more than Rs. 15,000 was classified as HIG. For rural areas a household satisfying any three of the following four criteria was classified as HIG:

- 1) Owning a motor vehicle
 - 2) Owning a pucca house with a living room to entertain guests
 - 3) Owning a telephone or a television
 - 4) Owners of shops with a daily sale of Rs. 700 to Rs. 1000 throughout the year
- A household satisfying any three of the following four criteria was classified as LIG
- 1) Small landholding (sufficient agricultural produce for only 6 months)
 - 2) Kuccha house with only one or two small rooms
 - 3) Total cash income from all sources less than Rs. 2,500 per month
 - 4) More than 6 people in the household

Any household not falling in the above two categories was classified as MIG

APPENDIX 3

Survey Questionnaire

- 1) What is a good school?
- 2) What is your expectation from your child?
- 3) Is there any difference in your expectation between boys and girls?
- 4) What is the difference between a literate person and an illiterate person?
- 5) What do you mean by 'bigadna' or 'barbad hona'?